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THE LITTLE DREAM
JUSTICE

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BY

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NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1919

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To
JOHN MASEFIELD

1688

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The order of these plays follows the chronology of their writing, not that of their production. "The Eldest Son" was written—first of the three—in the early months of 1909. Accidents, happy and unhappy, have prevented its performance earlier than November, 1912.

THE ELDEST SON

A DOMESTIC DRAMA IN THREE ACTS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

SIR WILLIAM CHESHIRE, *a baronet*
LADY CHESHIRE, *his wife*
BILL, *their eldest son*
HAROLD, *their second son*
RONALD KEITH (*in the Lancers*), *their son-in-law*
CHRISTINE (*his wife*), *their eldest daughter*
DOT, *their second daughter*
JOAN, *their third daughter*
MABEL LANFARNE, *their guest*
THE REVEREND JOHN LATTER, *engaged to Joan*
OLD STUDDENHAM, *the head-keeper*
FREDA STUDDENHAM, *the lady's-maid*
YOUNG DUNNING, *the under-keeper*
ROSE TAYLOR, *a village girl*
JACKSON, *the butler*
CHARLES, *a footman*

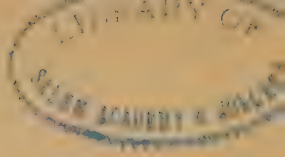
TIME: The present. The action passes on December 7 and 8 at the Cheshires' country house, in one of the shires.

ACT I. SCENE I. The hall; before dinner.

SCENE II. The hall; after dinner.

ACT II. Lady Cheshire's morning room; after breakfast.

ACT III. The smoking-room; tea-time.
A night elapses between Acts I. and II.



ACT I

SCENE I

The scene is a well-lighted, and large, oak-panelled hall, with an air of being lived in, and a broad, oak staircase. The dining-room, drawing-room, billiard-room, all open into it; and under the staircase a door leads to the servants' quarters. In a huge fire-place a log fire is burning. There are tiger-skins on the floor, horns on the walls; and a writing-table against the wall opposite the fireplace. FREDA STUDDENHAM, *a pretty, pale girl with dark eyes, in the black dress of a lady's-maid, is standing at the foot of the staircase with a bunch of white roses in one hand, and a bunch of yellow roses in the other. A door closes above, and* SIR WILLIAM CHESHIRE, *in evening dress, comes downstairs. He is perhaps fifty-eight, of strong build, rather bull-necked, with grey eyes, and a well-coloured face, whose choleric autocracy is veiled by a thin urbanity. He speaks before he reaches the bottom.*

SIR WILLIAM. Well, Freda! Nice roses. Who are they for?

FREDA. My lady told me to give the yellow to Mrs. Keith, Sir William, and the white to Miss Lanfarne, for their first evening.

SIR WILLIAM. Capital. [*Passing on towards the drawing-room*] Your father coming up to-night?

FREDA. Yes.

SIR WILLIAM. Be good enough to tell him I specially want to see him here after dinner, will you?

FREDA. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. By the way, just ask him to bring the game-book in, if he's got it.

He goes out into the drawing-room; and FREDA *stands restlessly tapping her foot against the bottom stair. With a flutter of skirts* CHRISTINE KEITH *comes rapidly down. She is a nice-looking, fresh-coloured young woman in a low-necked dress.*

CHRISTINE. Hullo, Freda! How are *you?*

FREDA. Quite well, thank you, Miss Christine—Mrs. Keith, I mean. My lady told me to give you these.

CHRISTINE. [*Taking the roses*] Oh! Thanks! How sweet of mother!

FREDA. [*In a quick, toneless voice*] The others are for Miss Lanfarne. My lady thought white would suit her better.

CHRISTINE. They suit *you* in that black dress.

[FREDA *lowers the roses quickly.*

What do you think of Joan's engagement?

FREDA. It's very nice for her.

CHRISTINE. I say, Freda, have they been going hard at rehearsals?

FREDA. Every day. Miss Dot gets very cross, stage-managing.

CHRISTINE. I do hate learning a part. Thanks awfully for unpacking. Any news?

FREDA. [*In the same quick, dull voice*] The under-keeper, Dunning, won't marry Rose Taylor, after all.

CHRISTINE. What a shame! But I say that's serious. I thought there was—she was—I mean——

FREDA. He's taken up with another girl, they say.

CHRISTINE. Too bad! [*Pinning the roses*] D'you know if Mr. Bill's come?

FREDA. [*With a swift upward look*] Yes, by the six-forty.

RONALD KEITH *comes slowly down, a weathered firm-lipped man, in evening dress, with eyelids half drawn over his keen eyes, and the air of a horseman.*

KEITH. Hallo! Roses in December. I say, Freda, your father missed a wigging this morning when they drew blank at Warnham's spinney. Where's that litter of little foxes?

FREDA. [*Smiling faintly*] I expect father knows, Captain Keith.

KEITH. You bet he does. Emigration? Or thin air? What?

CHRISTINE. Studdenham'd never shoot a fox, Ronny. He's been here since the flood.

KEITH. There's more ways of killing a cat—eh, Freda?

CHRISTINE. [*Moving with her husband towards the drawing-room*] Young Dunning won't marry that girl, Ronny.

KEITH. Phew! Wouldn't be in his shoes, then! Sir William'll never keep a servant who's made a scandal in the village, old girl. Bill come?

As they disappear from the hall, JOHN LATTER *in a clergyman's evening dress, comes sedately downstairs, a tall, rather pale young man, with something in him, as it were, both of heaven, and a drawing-room. He passes* FREDA *with a formal little nod.* HAROLD, *a fresh-cheeked, cheery-looking youth, comes down, three steps at a time.*

HAROLD. Hallo, Freda! Patience on the monument. Let's have a sniff! For Miss Lanfarne? Bill come down yet?

FREDA. No, Mr. Harold.

HAROLD *crosses the hall, whistling, and follows* LATTER *into the drawing-room. There is the sound of a scuffle above, and a voice crying: "Shut up, Dot!" And* JOAN *comes down screwing her head back. She is pretty and small, with large clinging eyes.*

JOAN. Am I all right behind, Freda? That beast, Dot!

FREDA. Quite, Miss Joan.

DOT'S *face, like a full moon, appears over the upper banisters. She too comes running down, a frank figure, with the face of a rebel.*

DOT. You little *being!*

JOAN. [*Flying towards the drawing-room, is overtaken at the door*] Oh! Dot! You're pinching!

As they disappear into the drawing-room, MABEL LANFARNE, *a tall girl with a rather charming Irish face, comes slowly down. And at sight of her* FREDA'S *whole figure becomes set and meaning-full.*

FREDA. For you, Miss Lanfarne, from my lady.

MABEL. [*In whose speech is a touch of wilful Irishry*] How sweet! [*Fastening the roses*] And how are *you*, Freda?

FREDA. Very well, thank you.

MABEL. And your father? Hope he's going to let me come out with the guns again.

FREDA. [*Stolidly*] He'll be delighted, I'm sure.

MABEL. Ye-es! I haven't forgotten his face—last time.

FREDA. You stood with Mr. Bill. He's better to stand with than Mr. Harold, or Captain Keith?

MABEL. He didn't touch a feather, that day.

FREDA. People don't when they're anxious to do their best.

A gong sounds. And MABEL LANFARNE, *giving* FREDA *a rather inquisitive stare, moves on to the drawing-room. Left alone without the roses,* FREDA *still lingers. At the slamming of a door above, and hasty footsteps, she shrinks back against the stairs.* BILL *runs down, and comes on her suddenly. He is a tall, good-looking*

edition of his father, with the same stubborn look of veiled choler.

BILL. Freda! [*And as she shrinks still further back*] What's the matter? [*Then at some sound he looks round uneasily and draws away from her*] Aren't you glad to see me?

FREDA. I've something to say to you, Mr. Bill. After dinner.

BILL. Mister——?

She passes him, and rushes away upstairs. And BILL, *who stands frowning and looking after her, recovers himself sharply as the drawing-room door is opened, and* SIR WILLIAM *and* MISS LANFARNE *come forth, followed by* KEITH, DOT, HAROLD, CHRISTINE, LATTER, *and* JOAN, *all leaning across each other, and talking. By herself, behind them, comes* LADY CHESHIRE, *a refined-looking woman of fifty, with silvery dark hair, and an expression at once gentle, and ironic. They move across the hall towards the dining-room.*

SIR WILLIAM. Ah! Bill.

MABEL. How do you do?

KEITH. How are you, old chap?

DOT. [*gloomily*] Do you know your part?

HAROLD. Hallo, old man!

CHRISTINE *gives her brother a flying kiss.* JOAN *and* LATTER *pause and look at him shyly without speech.*

BILL. [*Putting his hand on* JOAN'S *shoulder*] Good luck, you two! Well mother?

LADY CHESHIRE. Well, my dear boy! Nice to see you at last. What a long time!

She draws his arm through hers, and they move towards the dining-room.

The curtain falls.

The curtain rises again at once.

SCENE II

CHRISTINE, LADY CHESHIRE, DOT, MABEL LANFARNE, *and* JOAN, *are returning to the hall after dinner.*

CHRISTINE. [*in a low voice*] Mother, is it true about young Dunning and Rose Taylor?

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm afraid so, dear.

CHRISTINE. But can't they be——

DOT. Ah! ah-h! [CHRISTINE *and her mother are silent.*] My child, I'm not the young person.

CHRISTINE. No, of course not—only—[*nodding towards* JOAN *and Mabel*].

DOT. Look here! This is just an instance of what I hate.

LADY CHESHIRE. My dear? Another one?

DOT. Yes, mother, and don't you pretend you don't understand, because you know you do.

CHRISTINE. Instance? Of what?

JOAN *and* MABEL *have ceased talking, and listen, still at the fire.*

DOT. Humbug, of course. Why should you want them to marry, if he's tired of her?

CHRISTINE. [*Ironically*] Well! If your imagination doesn't carry you as far as that!

DOT. When people marry, do you believe they ought to be in love with each other?

CHRISTINE. [*With a shrug*] That's not the point.

DOT. Oh? Were you in love with Ronny?

CHRISTINE. Don't be idiotic!

DOT. Would you have married him if you hadn't been?

CHRISTINE. Of course not!

JOAN. Dot! You are!——

DOT. Hallo! my little snipe!

LADY CHESHIRE. Dot, dear!

DOT. Don't shut me up, mother! [*To* JOAN.] Are you in love with John? [JOAN *turns hurriedly to the fire.*] Would you be going to marry him if you were not?

CHRISTINE. You are a brute, Dot.

DOT. Is Mabel in love with—whoever she is in love with?

MABEL. And I wonder who that is.

DOT. Well, would you marry him if you weren't?

MABEL. No, I would *not.*

DOT. Now, mother; did you love father?

CHRISTINE. Dot, you really are awful.

DOT. [*Rueful and detached*] Well, it is a bit too thick, perhaps.

JOAN. Dot!

DOT. Well, mother, did you—I mean quite calmly?

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes, dear, quite calmly.

DOT. Would you have married him if you hadn't? [LADY CHESHIRE *shakes her head*] Then we're all agreed!

MABEL. Except yourself.

DOT. [*Grimly*] *Even* if I loved him, he might think himself lucky if I married him.

MABEL. Indeed, and I'm not so sure.

DOT. [*Making a face at her*] What I was going to——

LADY CHESHIRE. But don't you think, dear, you'd better not?

DOT. Well, I won't say what I was going to say, but what I do say is—Why the devil——

LADY CHESHIRE. Quite so, Dot!

DOT. [*A little disconcerted.*] If they're tired of each other, they ought not to marry, and if father's going to make them——

CHRISTINE. You don't understand in the least. It's for the sake of the——

DOT. Out with it, Old Sweetness! The approaching infant! God bless it!

There is a sudden silence, for KEITH *and* LATTER *are seen coming from the dining-room.*

LATTER. That must be so, Ronny.

KEITH. No, John; not a bit of it!

LATTER. You don't *think!*

KEITH. Good Gad, who wants to think after dinner!

DOT. Come on! Let's play pool. [*She turns at the billiard-room door.*] Look here! Rehearsal to-morrow is

directly after breakfast; from "Eccles enters breathless" to the end.

MABEL. Whatever made you choose "Caste," Dot? You know it's awfully difficult.

DOT. Because it's the only play that's not too advanced. [*The girls all go into the billiard-room.*

LADY CHESHIRE. Where's Bill, Ronny?

KEITH. [*With a grimace*] I rather think Sir William and he are in Committee of Supply—Mem-Sahib.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh!

She looks uneasily at the dining-room; then follows the girls out.

LATTER. [*In the tone of one resuming an argument*] There can't be two opinions about it, Ronny. Young Dunning's refusal is simply indefensible.

KEITH. I don't agree a bit, John.

LATTER. Of course, if you won't listen.

KEITH. [*Clipping a cigar*] Draw it mild, my dear chap. We've had the whole thing over twice at least.

LATTER. My point is this——

KEITH. [*Regarding* LATTER *quizzically with his half-closed eyes*] I know—I know—but the point is, how far your point is simply professional.

LATTER. If a man wrongs a woman, he ought to right her again. There's no answer to that.

KEITH. It all depends.

LATTER. That's rank opportunism.

KEITH. Rats! Look here—Oh! hang it, John, one can't argue this out with a parson.

LATTER. [*Frigidly*] Why not?

HAROLD. [*Who has entered from the dining-room*] Pull devil, pull baker!

KEITH. Shut up, Harold!

LATTER. "To play the game" is the religion even of the Army.

KEITH. Exactly, but what *is* the game?

LATTER. What else can it be in this case?

KEITH. You're too puritanical, young John. You can't help it—line of country laid down for you. All drag-huntin'! What!

LATTER. [*With concentration*] Look here!

HAROLD. [*Imitating the action of a man pulling at a horse's head*] 'Come hup, I say, you hugly beast!'

KEITH. [*To* LATTER] You're not going to draw me, old chap. You don't see where you'd land us all. [*He smokes calmly*]

LATTER. How do you imagine vice takes its rise? From precisely this sort of thing of young Dunning's.

KEITH. From human nature, I should have thought, John. I admit that I don't like a fellow's leavin' a girl in the lurch; but I don't see the use in drawin' hard and fast rules. You only have to break 'em. Sir William and you would just tie Dunning and the girl up together, willy-nilly, to save appearances, and ten to one but there'll be the deuce to pay in a year's time. You can take a horse to the water, you can't make him drink.

LATTER. I entirely and absolutely disagree with you.

HAROLD. Good old John!

LATTER. At all events we know where your principles take you.

KEITH. [*Rather dangerously*] Where, please? [HAROLD *turns up his eyes, and points downwards*] Dry up, Harold!

LATTER. Did you ever hear the story of Faust?

KEITH. Now look here, John; with all due respect to your cloth, and all the politeness in the world, you may go to—blazes.

LATTER. Well, I must say, Ronny—of all the rude boors—— [*He turns towards the billiard-room.*

KEITH. Sorry I smashed the glass, old chap.

LATTER *passes out. There comes a mingled sound through the opened door, of female voices, laughter, and the click of billiard balls, clipped off by the sudden closing of the door.*

KEITH. [*Impersonally*] Deuced odd, the way a parson puts one's back up! Because you know I agree with him really; young Dunning *ought* to play the game; and I hope Sir William'll make him.

The butler JACKSON *has entered from the door under the stairs followed by the keeper* STUDDENHAM, *a man between fifty and sixty, in a full-skirted coat with big pockets, cord breeches, and gaiters; he has a steady self-respecting weathered face, with blue eyes and a short grey beard, which has obviously once been red.*

KEITH. Hullo! Studdenham!

STUDDENHAM. [*Touching his forehead*] Evenin', Captain Keith.

JACKSON. Sir William still in the dining-room with Mr. Bill, sir?

HAROLD. [*With a grimace*] He is, Jackson.

JACKSON *goes out to the dining-room.*

KEITH. You've shot no pheasants yet, Studdenham?

STUDDENHAM. No, sir. Only birds. We'll be doin' the spinneys and the home covert while you're down.

KEITH. I say, talkin' of spinneys——

He breaks off sharply, and goes out with HAROLD *into the billiard-room.* SIR WILLIAM *enters from the dining-room, applying a gold tooth-pick to his front teeth.*

SIR WILLIAM. Ah! Studdenham. Bad business this, about young Dunning!

STUDDENHAM. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. He definitely refuses to marry her?

STUDDENHAM. He does that.

SIR WILLIAM. That won't do, you know. What reason does he give?

STUDDENHAM. Won't say other than that he don't want no more to do with her.

SIR WILLIAM. God bless me! That's not a reason. I can't have a keeper of mine playing fast and loose in the village like this. [*Turning to* LADY CHESHIRE, *who has come in from the billiard-room*] That affair of young Dunning's, my dear.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! Yes! I'm *so* sorry, Studdenham. The poor girl!

STUDDENHAM. [*Respectfully*] Fancy he's got a feeling she's not his equal, now, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*To herself*] Yes, I suppose he *has* made her his superior.

SIR WILLIAM. What? Eh! Quite! Quite! I was just telling Studdenham the fellow must set the matter straight. We can't have open scandals in the village. If he wants to keep his place he must marry her at once.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*To her husband in a low voice*] Is it right to force them? Do you know what the girl wishes, Studdenham?

STUDDENHAM. Shows a spirit, my lady—says she'll have him—willin' or not.

LADY CHESHIRE. A spirit? I see. If they marry like that they're sure to be miserable.

SIR WILLIAM. What! Doesn't follow at all. Besides, my dear, you ought to know by this time, there's an unwritten law in these matters. They're perfectly well aware that when there are consequences, they have to take them.

STUDDENHAM. Some o' these young people, my lady, they don't put two and two together no more than an old cock pheasant.

SIR WILLIAM. I'll give him till to-morrow. If he remains obstinate, he'll have to go; he'll get no character, Studdenham. Let him know what I've said. I like the fellow, he's a good keeper. I don't want to lose him. But this sort of thing I won't have. He must toe the mark or take himself off. Is he up here to-night?

STUDDENHAM. Hangin' partridges, Sir William. Will you have him in?

SIR WILLIAM. [*Hesitating*] Yes—yes. I'll see him.

STUDDENHAM. Good-night to you, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. Freda's not looking well, Studdenham.

STUDDENHAM. She's a bit pernickitty with her food, that's where it is.

LADY CHESHIRE. I must try and make her eat.

SIR WILLIAM. Oh! Studdenham. We'll shoot the home covert first. What did we get last year?

STUDDENHAM. [*Producing the game-book; but without reference to it*] Two hundred and fifty-three pheasants, eleven hares, fifty-two rabbits, three woodcock, sundry.

SIR WILLIAM. Sundry? Didn't include a fox did it? [*Gravely*] I was seriously upset this morning at Warnham's spinney——

STUDDENHAM. [*Very gravely*] You don't say, Sir William; that four-year-old he du look a handful!

SIR WILLIAM. [*With a sharp look*] You know well enough what I mean.

STUDDENHAM. [*Unmoved*] Shall I send young Dunning, Sir William?

SIR WILLIAM *gives a short, sharp nod, and* STUDDENHAM *retires by the door under the stairs.*

SIR WILLIAM. Old fox!

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't be too hard on Dunning. He's very young.

SIR WILLIAM. [*Patting her arm*] My dear, you don't understand young fellows, how should you?

LADY CHESHIRE. [*With her faint irony*] A husband and two sons not counting. [*Then as the door under the stairs is opened*] Bill, now do——

SIR WILLIAM. I'll be gentle with him. [*Sharply*] Come in!

LADY CHESHIRE *retires to the billiard-room. She gives a look back and a half smile at young* DUNNING, *a fair young man dressed in brown cords and leggings, and holding his cap in his hand; then goes out.*

SIR WILLIAM. Evenin', Dunning.

DUNNING. [*Twisting his cap*] Evenin', Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. Studdenham's told you what I want to see you about?

DUNNING. Yes, Sir.

SIR WILLIAM. The thing's in your hands. Take it or leave it. I don't put pressure on you. I simply won't have this sort of thing on my estate.

DUNNING. I'd like to say, Sir William, that she— [*He stops*].

SIR WILLIAM. Yes, I daresay—Six of one and half a dozen of the other. Can't go into that.

DUNNING. No, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. I'm quite mild with you. This is your first place. If you leave here you'll get no character.

DUNNING. I never meant any harm, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. My good fellow, you know the custom of the country.

DUNNING. Yes, Sir William, but——

SIR WILLIAM. You should have looked before you leaped. I'm not forcing you. If you refuse you must go, that's all.

DUNNING. Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. Well, now go along and take a day to think it over.

BILL, *who has sauntered moodily from the dining-room, stands by the stairs listening. Catching sight of him,* DUNNING *raises his hand to his forelock.*

DUNNING. Very good, Sir William. [*He turns, fumbles, and turns again*] My old mother's dependent on me——

SIR WILLIAM. Now, Dunning, I've no more to say.

[*Dunning goes sadly away under the stairs.*

SIR WILLIAM. [*Following*] And look here! Just understand this—— [*He too goes out.*

BILL, *lighting a cigarette, has approached the writing-table. He looks very glum. The billiard-room door is flung open.* MABEL LANFARNE *appears, and makes him a little curtsey.*

MABEL. Against my will I am bidden to bring you in to pool.

BILL. Sorry! I've got letters.

MABEL. You seem to have become very conscientious.

BILL. Oh! I don't know.

MABEL. Do you remember the last day of the covert shooting?

BILL. I do.

MABEL. [*Suddenly*] What a pretty girl Freda Studdenham's grown!

BILL. Has she?

MABEL. "She walks in beauty."

BILL. Really? Hadn't noticed.

MABEL. Have you been taking lessons in conversation?

BILL. Don't think so.

MABEL. Oh! [*There is a silence*] Mr. Cheshire!

BILL. Miss Lanfarne!

MABEL. What's the matter with you? Aren't you rather queer, considering that I don't bite, and *was* rather a pal!

BILL. [*Stolidly*] I'm sorry.

Then seeing that his mother has come in from the billiard-room, he sits down at the writing-table.

LADY CHESHIRE. Mabel, dear, do take my cue. Won't you play too, Bill, and try and stop Ronny, he's too terrible?

BILL. Thanks. I've got these letters.

MABEL *taking the cue passes back into the billiard-room, whence comes out the sound of talk and laughter.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Going over and standing behind her son's chair*] Anything wrong, darling?

BILL. Nothing, thanks. [*Suddenly*] I say, I wish you hadn't asked that girl here.

LADY CHESHIRE. Mabel! Why? She's wanted for rehearsals. I thought you got on so well with her last Christmas.

BILL. [*With a sort of sullen exasperation*] A year ago.

LADY CHESHIRE. The girls like her, so does your father; personally I must say I think she's rather nice and Irish.

BILL. She's all right, I daresay.

He looks round as if to show his mother that he wishes to be left alone. But LADY CHESHIRE, *having seen that he is about to look at her, is not looking at him.*

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm afraid your father's been talking to you, Bill.

BILL. He has.

LADY CHESHIRE. Debts? Do try and make allowances. [*With a faint smile*] Of course he is a little——

BILL. He is.

LADY CHESHIRE. I wish *I* could——

BILL. Oh, Lord! Don't *you* get mixed up in it!

LADY CHESHIRE. It seems almost a pity that you told him.

BILL. He wrote and asked me point blank what I owed.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! [*Forcing herself to speak in a casual voice*] I happen to have a little money, Bill—— I think it would be simpler if——

BILL. Now look here, mother, you've tried that before. I can't help spending money, I never *shall* be able, unless I go to the Colonie , or something of the kind.

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't talk like that, dear!

BILL. I *would*, for two straws!

LADY CHESHIRE. It's only because your father thinks such a lot of the place, and the name, and your career. The Cheshires are all like that. They've been here so long; they're all—root.

BILL. Deuced funny business my career will be, I expect!

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Fluttering, but restraining herself lest he should see*] But, Bill, why *must* you spend more than your allowance?

BILL. Why—anything? I didn't make myself.

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm afraid *we* did that. It *was* inconsiderate, perhaps.

BILL. Yes, you'd better have left me out.

LADY CHESHIRE. But why are you so— Only a little fuss about money!

BILL. Ye-es.

LADY CHESHIRE. You're not keeping anything from me, are you?

BILL. [*Facing her*] No. [*He then turns very deliberately to the writing things, and takes up a pen*] I must write these letters, please.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill, if there's any real trouble, you will tell me, won't you?

BILL. There's nothing whatever.

He suddenly gets up and walks about.

LADY CHESHIRE, *too, moves over to the fireplace, and after an uneasy look at him, turns to the fire. Then, as if trying to switch off his mood, she changes the subject abruptly.*

LADY CHESHIRE. Isn't it a pity about young Dunning? I'm so sorry for Rose Taylor.

There is a silence. Stealthily under the staircase FREDA *has entered, and seeing only* BILL, *advances to speak to him.*

BILL. [*Suddenly*] Oh! well, you can't help these things in the country.

As he speaks, FREDA *stops dead, perceiving that he is not alone;* BILL, *too, catching sight of her, starts.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Still speaking to the fire*] It seems dreadful to force him. I do so believe in people doing things of their own accord. [*Then seeing* FREDA *standing so uncertainly by the stairs*] Do you want me, Freda?

FREDA. Only your cloak, my lady. Shall I—begin it?

At this moment SIR WILLIAM *enters from the drawing-room.*

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes, yes.

SIR WILLIAM. [*Genially*] Can you give me another five minutes, Bill? [*Pointing to the billiard-room*] We'll come directly, my dear.

FREDA, *with a look at* BILL, *has gone back whence she came; and* LADY CHESHIRE *goes reluctantly away into the billiard-room.*

SIR WILLIAM. I shall give young Dunning short shrift. [*He moves over to the fireplace and divides his coat-tails*] Now, about you, Bill! I don't want to bully you the moment you come down, but you know, this can't go on. I've paid your debts twice. Shan't pay them this time unless I see a disposition to change your mode of life. [*A pause*] You get your extravagance from your mother. She's very queer—[*A pause*]—All the Winterleghs are like that about money.

BILL. Mother's particularly generous, if that's what you mean.

SIR WILLIAM. [*Drily*] We will put it that way. [*A pause*] At the present moment you owe, as I understand it, eleven hundred pounds.

BILL. About that.

SIR WILLIAM. Mere flea-bite. [*A pause*] I've a proposition to make.

BILL. Won't it do to-morrow, sir?

SIR WILLIAM. "To-morrow" appears to be your motto in life.

BILL. Thanks!

SIR WILLIAM. I'm anxious to change it to-day. [BILL *looks at him in silence*] It's time you took your position seriously, instead of hanging about town, racing, and playing polo, and what not.

BILL. Go ahead!

At something dangerous in his voice, SIR WILLIAM *modifies his attitude.*

SIR WILLIAM. The proposition's very simple. I can't suppose anything so rational and to your advantage will appeal to you, but [*drily*] I mention it. Marry a nice girl, settle down, and stand for the division; you can have the Dower House and fifteen hundred a year, and I'll pay your debts into the bargain. If you're elected I'll make it two thousand. Plenty of time to work up the constituency before we kick out these infernal Rads. Carpet-bagger against you; if you go hard at it in the summer, it'll be odd if you don't manage to get in your three days a week, next season. You can take Rocketer and that four-year-old—he's well up to your weight,

fully eight and a half inches of bone. You'll only want one other. And if Miss—if your wife means to hunt——

BILL. You've chosen my wife, then?

SIR WILLIAM. [*With a quick look*] I imagine, you've some girl in your mind.

BILL. Ah!

SIR WILLIAM. Used not to be unnatural at your age. I married your mother at twenty-eight. Here you are, eldest son of a family that stands for something. The more I see of the times the more I'm convinced that everybody who is anybody has got to buckle to, and save the landmarks left. Unless we're true to our caste, and prepared to work for it, the landed classes are going to go under to this infernal democratic spirit in the air. The outlook's very serious. We're threatened in a hundred ways. If you mean business, you'll want a wife. When I came into the property I should have been lost without your mother.

BILL. I thought this was coming.

SIR WILLIAM. [*With a certain geniality*] My dear fellow, I don't want to put a pistol to your head. You've had a slack rein so far. I've never objected to your sowing a few wild oats—so long as you—er—[*Unseen by* SIR WILLIAM, BILL *makes a sudden movement*] Short of that—at all events, I've not inquired into your affairs. I can only judge by the—er—pecuniary evidence you've been good enough to afford me from time to time. I imagine you've lived like a good many young men in your position—I'm not blaming you, but there's a time for all things.

BILL. Why don't you say outright that you want me to marry Mabel Lanfarne?

SIR WILLIAM. Well, I do. Girl's a nice one. Good family—got a little money—rides well. Isn't she good-looking enough for you, or what?

BILL. Quite, thanks.

SIR WILLIAM. I understood from your mother that you and she were on good terms.

BILL. Please don't drag mother into it.

SIR WILLIAM. [*With dangerous politeness*] Perhaps you'll be good enough to state your objections.

BILL. Must we go on with this?

SIR WILLIAM. I've never asked you to do anything for me before; I expect you to pay attention now. I've no wish to dragoon you into this particular marriage. If you don't care for Miss Lanfarne, marry a girl you're fond of.

BILL. I refuse.

SIR WILLIAM. In that case you know what to look out for. [*With a sudden rush of choler*] You young . . . [*He checks himself and stands glaring at* BILL, *who glares back at him*] This means, I suppose, that you've got some entanglement or other.

BILL. Suppose what you like, sir.

SIR WILLIAM. I warn you, if you play the blackguard——

BILL. You can't force me like young Dunning.

Hearing the raised voices LADY CHESHIRE *has come back from the billiard-room.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Closing the door*] What is it?

SIR WILLIAM. You deliberately refuse! Go away, Dorothy.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Resolutely*] I haven't seen Bill for two months.

SIR WILLIAM. What! [*Hesitating*] Well—we must talk it over again.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come to the billiard-room, both of you! Bill, *do* finish those letters!

With a deft movement she draws SIR WILLIAM *toward the billiard-room, and glances back at* BILL *before going out, but he has turned to the writing-table. When the door is closed,* BILL *looks into the drawing-room, then opens the door under the stairs; and backing away towards the writing-table, sits down there, and takes up a pen.* FREDA *who has evidently been waiting, comes in and stands by the table.*

BILL. I say, this is dangerous, you know.

FREDA. Yes—but I must.

BILL. Well, then—[*With natural recklessness*] Aren't you going to kiss me?

Without moving she looks at him with a sort of miserable inquiry.

BILL. Do you know you haven't seen me for eight weeks?

FREDA. Quite—long enough—for you to have forgotten.

BILL. Forgotten! I don't forget people so soon.

FREDA. No?

BILL. What's the matter with you, Freda?

FREDA. [*After a long look*] It'll never be as it was.

BILL. [*Jumping up*] How d'you mean?

FREDA. I've got something for you. [*She takes a diamond ring out of her dress and holds it out to him*] I've not worn it since Cromer.

BILL. Now, look here——

FREDA. I've had my holiday; I shan't get another in a hurry.

BILL. Freda!

FREDA. You'll be glad to be free. That fortnight's all you really loved me in.

BILL. [*Putting his hands on her arms*] I swear——

FREDA. [*Between her teeth*] Miss Lanfarne need never know about me.

BILL. So that's it! I've told you a dozen times—nothing's changed. [FREDA *looks at him and smiles.*

BILL. Oh! very well! If you *will* make yourself miserable.

FREDA. Everybody will be pleased.

BILL. At what?

FREDA. When you marry her.

BILL. This is too bad.

FREDA. It's what always happens—even when it's not a gentleman.

BILL. That's enough.

FREDA. But I'm not like that girl down in the village. You needn't be afraid I'll say anything when—it comes. That's what I had to tell you.

BILL. *What!*

FREDA. *I* can keep a secret.

BILL. Do you mean this? [*She bows her head.*

BILL. Good God!

FREDA. Father brought me up not to whine. Like the puppies when they hold them up by their tails. [*With a sudden break in her voice*] Oh! Bill!

BILL. [*With his head down, seizing her hands*] Freda! [*He breaks away from her towards the fire*] Good God!

She stands looking at him, then quietly slips away by the door under the staircase. BILL *turns to speak to her, and sees that she has gone. He walks up to the fireplace, and grips the mantelpiece.*

BILL. By Jove! This is ——!

The curtain falls.

ACT II

The scene is LADY CHESHIRE'S *morning room, at ten o'clock on the following day. It is a pretty room, with white panelled walls; and chrysanthemums and carmine lilies in bowls. A large bow window overlooks the park under a sou'-westerly sky. A piano stands open; a fire is burning; and the morning's correspondence is scattered on a writing-table. Doors opposite each other lead to the maid's workroom, and to a corridor.* LADY CHESHIRE *is standing in the middle of the room, looking at an opera cloak, which* FREDA *is holding out.*

LADY CHESHIRE. Well, Freda, suppose you just give it up!

FREDA. I don't like to be beaten.

LADY CHESHIRE. You're not to worry over your work. And by the way, I promised your father to make you eat more. [FREDA *smiles.*

LADY CHESHIRE. It's all very well to smile. You want bracing up. Now don't be naughty. I shall give you a tonic. And I think you had better put that cloak away.

FREDA. I'd rather have one more try, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Sitting down at her writing-table*] Very well.

FREDA *goes out into her workroom, as* JACKSON *comes in from the corridor.*

JACKSON. Excuse me, my lady. There's a young woman from the village, says you wanted to see her.

LADY CHESHIRE. Rose Taylor? Ask her to come in. Oh! and Jackson the car for the meet please at half-past ten.

JACKSON *having bowed and withdrawn,* LADY CHESHIRE *rises with marked signs of nervousness, which she has only just suppressed, when* ROSE TAYLOR, *a stolid country girl, comes in and stands waiting by the door.*

LADY CHESHIRE. Well, Rose. Do come in!

[ROSE *advances perhaps a couple of steps.*

LADY CHESHIRE. I just wondered whether you'd like to ask my advice. Your engagement with Dunning's broken off, isn't it?

ROSE. Yes—but I've told him he's got to marry me.

LADY CHESHIRE. I see! And you think that'll be the wisest thing?

ROSE. [*Stolidly*] I don't know, my lady. He's *got* to.

LADY CHESHIRE. I do hope you're a little fond of him still.

ROSE. I'm *not.* He don't deserve it.

LADY CHESHIRE. And—do you think he's quite lost his affection for you?

ROSE. I suppose so, else he wouldn't treat me as he's done. He's after that—that—He didn't ought to treat me as if I was dead.

LADY CHESHIRE. No, no—of course. But you *will* think it all well over, won't you?

ROSE. I've a-got nothing to think over, except what I know of.

LADY CHESHIRE. But for you both to marry in that spirit! You know it's for life, Rose. [*Looking into her face*] I'm always ready to help you.

ROSE. [*Dropping a very slight curtsey*] Thank you, my lady, but I think he ought to marry me. I've told him he ought.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Sighing*] Well, that's all I wanted to say. It's a question of your self-respect; I can't give you any real advice. But just remember that if you want a friend——

ROSE. [*With a gulp*] I'm not so 'ard, really. I only want him to do what's right by me.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*With a little lift of her eyebrows—gently*] Yes, yes—I see.

ROSE. [*Glancing back at the door*] I don't like meeting the servants.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come along, I'll take you out another way. [*As they reach the door,* DOT *comes in.*

DOT. [*With a glance at* ROSE] Can we have this room for the mouldy rehearsal, Mother?

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes, dear, you can air it here.

Holding the door open for ROSE *she follows her out. And* DOT, *with a book of "Caste" in her hand, arranges the room according to a diagram.*

DOT. Chair—chair—table—chair—Dash! Table—piano—fire—window! [*Producing a pocket comb*] Comb for Eccles. Cradle?—Cradle—[*She viciously dumps a*

waste-paper basket down, and drops a footstool into it] Brat! [*Then reading from the book gloomily*] "Enter Eccles breathless. Esther and Polly rise—Esther puts on lid of bandbox." Bandbox!

Searching for something to represent a bandbox, she opens the workroom door.

DOT. Freda?

FREDA *comes in.*

DOT. I say, Freda. Anything the matter? You seem awfully down. [FREDA *does not answer.*

DOT. You haven't looked anything of a lollipop lately.

FREDA. I'm quite all right, thank you, Miss Dot.

DOT. Has Mother been givin' you a tonic?

FREDA. [*Smiling a little*] Not yet.

DOT. That doesn't account for it then. [*With a sudden warm impulse*] What *is* it, Freda?

FREDA. Nothing.

DOT. [*Switching off on a different line of thought*] Are you very busy this morning?

FREDA. Only this cloak for my lady.

DOT. Oh! that can wait. I may have to get you in to prompt, if I can't keep 'em straight. [*Gloomily*] They stray so. Would you mind?

FREDA. [*Stolidly*] I shall be very glad, Miss Dot.

DOT. [*Eyeing her dubiously*] All right. Let's see—what did I want?

JOAN *has come in.*

JOAN. Look here, Dot; about the baby in this scene. I'm sure I ought to make more of it.

DOT. Romantic little beast! [*She plucks the footstool out by one ear, and holds it forth*] Let's see you try!

JOAN. [*Recoiling*] But, Dot, what are we really going to have for the baby? I can't rehearse with that thing. Can't *you* suggest something, Freda?

FREDA. Borrow a real one, Miss Joan. There are some that don't count much.

JOAN. Freda, how horrible!

DOT. [*Dropping the footstool back into the basket*] You'll just put up with what you're given.

Then as CHRISTINE *and* MABEL LANFARNE *come in,* FREDA *turns abruptly and goes out.*

DOT. Buck up! Where are Bill and Harold? [*To* JOAN] Go and find them, mouse-cat.

But BILL *and* HAROLD, *followed by* LATTER, *are already in the doorway. They come in, and* LATTER, *stumbling over the waste-paper basket, takes it up to improve its position.*

DOT. Drop that cradle, John! [*As he picks the footstool out of it*] Leave the baby in! Now then! Bill, you enter there! [*She points to the workroom door where* BILL *and* MABEL *range themselves close to the piano; while* HAROLD *goes to the window*] John! get off the stage! Now then, "Eccles enters breathless, Esther and Polly rise." Wait a minute. I know now. [*She opens the workroom door*] Freda, I wanted a bandbox.

HAROLD. [*Cheerfully*] I hate beginning to rehearse, you know, you feel such a fool.

DOT. [*With her bandbox—gloomily*] You'll feel more of a fool when you have begun. [*To* BILL, *who is staring into the workroom*] Shut the door. Now.

[BILL *shuts the door.*

LATTER. [*Advancing*] Look here! I want to clear up a point of psychology before we start.

DOT. Good Lord!

LATTER. When I bring in the milk—ought I to bring it in seriously—as if I were accustomed—I mean, I maintain that if I'm——

JOAN. Oh! John, but I don't think it's meant that you should——

DOT. Shut up! Go back, John! Blow the milk! Begin, begin, begin! Bill!

LATTER. [*Turning round and again advancing*] But I think you underrate the importance of my entrance altogether.

MABEL. Oh! no, Mr. Latter!

LATTER. I don't in the least want to destroy the balance of the scene, but I do want to be clear about the spirit. What is the spirit?

DOT. [*With gloom*] Rollicking!

LATTER. Well, I don't think so. We shall run a great risk with this play, if we rollick.

DOT. Shall we? Now look here——!

MABEL. [*Softly to* BILL] Mr. Cheshire!

BILL. [*Desperately*] Let's get on!

DOT. [*Waving* LATTER *back*] Begin, begin! At last!

But JACKSON *has come in.*

JACKSON. [*To* CHRISTINE] Studdenham says, M'm, if the young ladies want to see the spaniel pups, he's brought 'em round.

JOAN. [*Starting up*] Oh! come on, John!

[*She flies towards the door, followed by* LATTER.

DOT. [*Gesticulating with her book*] Stop! You——

[CHRISTINE *and* HAROLD *also rush past.*

DOT. [*Despairingly*] First pick! [*Tearing her hair*] Pigs! Devils! [*She rushes after them.*

BILL *and* MABEL *are left alone.*

MABEL. [*Mockingly*] And don't *you* want one of the spaniel pups?

BILL. [*Painfully reserved and sullen, and conscious of the workroom door*] Can't keep a dog in town. You can have one, if you like. The breeding's all right.

MABEL. Sixth pick?

BILL. The girls'll give you one of theirs. They only fancy they want 'em.

MABEL. [*Moving nearer to him, with her hands clasped behind her*] You know, you remind me awfully of your father. Except that you're not nearly so polite. I don't understand you English—lords of the soil. The way you have of disposing of your females. [*With a sudden change of voice*] What was the matter with you last night? [*Softly*] Won't you tell me?

BILL. Nothing to tell.

MABEL. Ah! no, Mr. Bill.

BILL. [*Almost succumbing to her voice—then sullenly*] Worried, I suppose.

MABEL. [*Returning to her mocking*] Quite got over it?

BILL. Don't chaff me, please.

MABEL. You really are rather formidable.

BILL. Thanks.

MABEL. But, you know, I love to cross a field where there's a bull.

BILL. Really! Very interesting.

MABEL. The way of their only seeing one thing at a time. [*She moves back as he advances*] And overturning people on the journey.

BILL. Hadn't you better be a little careful?

MABEL. And never to see the hedge until they're stuck in it. And then straight from that hedge into the opposite one.

BILL. [*Savagely*] What makes you bait me this morning of all mornings?

MABEL. The beautiful morning! [*Suddenly*] It must be dull for poor Freda working in there with all this fun going on?

BILL. [*Glancing at the door*] Fun you call it?

MABEL. To go back to you, now—Mr. Cheshire.

BILL. No.

MABEL. You always make me feel so Irish. Is it because you're so English, d'you think? Ah! I can see him moving his ears. Now he's pawing the ground—He's started!

BILL. Miss Lanfarne!

MABEL. [*Still backing away from him, and drawing him on with her eyes and smile*] You can't help coming

after me! [*Then with a sudden change to a sort of stern gravity*] Can you? You'll feel that when I've gone.

They stand quite still, looking into each other's eyes and FREDA, *who has opened the door of the workroom stares at them.*

MABEL. [*Seeing her*] Here's the stile. *Adieu, Monsieur le taureau!*

She puts her hand behind her, opens the door, and slips through, leaving BILL *to turn, following the direction of her eyes, and see* FREDA *with the cloak still in her hand.*

BILL. [*Slowly walking towards her*] I haven't slept all night.

FREDA. No?

BILL. Have you been thinking it over?

[FREDA *gives a bitter little laugh.*

BILL. Don't! We must make a plan. I'll get you away. I won't let you suffer. I swear I won't.

FREDA. That will be clever.

BILL. I wish to Heaven my affairs weren't in such a mess.

FREDA. I shall be—all—right, thank you.

BILL. You *must* think me a blackguard. [*She shakes her head*] Abuse me—say something! Don't look like that!

FREDA. Were you ever really fond of me?

BILL. Of course I was, I am now. Give me your hands.

She looks at him, then drags her hands from his, and covers her face.

BILL. [*Clenching his fists*] Look here! I'll prove it. [*Then as she suddenly flings her arms round his neck and clings to him*] There, there!

There is a click of a door handle. They start away from each other, and see LADY CHESHIRE *regarding them.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Without irony*] I *beg* your pardon.

She makes as if to withdraw from an unwarranted intrusion, but suddenly turning, stands, with lips pressed together, waiting.

LADY CHESHIRE. Yes?

FREDA *has muffled her face. But* BILL *turns and confronts his mother.*

BILL. Don't say anything against her!

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Tries to speak to him and fails—then to* FREDA] Please—go!

BILL. [*Taking* FREDA'S *arm*] No.

LADY CHESHIRE, *after a moment's hesitation, herself moves towards the door.*

BILL. Stop, mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. I think perhaps not.

BILL. [*Looking at* FREDA, *who is cowering as though from a blow*] It's a d—d shame!

LADY CHESHIRE. It is.

BILL. [*With sudden resolution*] It's not as you think. I'm engaged to be married to her.

[FREDA *gives him a wild stare, and turns away.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Looking from one to the other*] I—don't—think—I—quite—understand.

BILL. [*With the brutality of his mortification*] What I said was plain enough.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill!

BILL. I tell you I am going to marry her.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*To* FREDA] Is that true?

[FREDA *gulps and remains silent.*

BILL. If you want to say anything, say it to *me*, mother.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Gripping the edge of a little table*] Give me a chair, please. [BILL *gives her a chair.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*To* FREDA] Please sit down too.

FREDA *sits on the piano stool, still turning her face away.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Fixing her eyes on* FREDA] Now!

BILL. I fell in love with her. And she with me.

LADY CHESHIRE. When?

BILL. In the summer.

LADY CHESHIRE. Ah!

BILL. It wasn't her fault.

LADY CHESHIRE. No?

BILL. [*With a sort of menace*] Mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. Forgive me, I am not quite used to the idea. You say that you—are engaged?

BILL. Yes.

LADY CHESHIRE. The reasons against such an engagement have occurred to you, I suppose? [*With a sudden change of tone*] Bill! what does it mean?

BILL. If you think she's trapped me into this——

LADY CHESHIRE. I do not. Neither do I think she has been trapped. I think nothing. I understand nothing.

BILL. [*Grimly*] Good!

LADY CHESHIRE. How long has this—engagement lasted?

BILL. [*After a silence*] Two months.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Suddenly*] This is—this is quite impossible.

BILL. You'll find it isn't.

LADY CHESHIRE. It's simple misery.

BILL. [*Pointing to the workroom*] Go and wait in there, Freda.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Quickly*] And are you still in love with her?

FREDA, *moving towards the workroom, smothers a sob.*

BILL. Of course I am.

FREDA *has gone, and as she goes,* LADY CHESHIRE *rises suddenly, forced by the intense feeling she has been keeping in hand.*

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill! Oh, Bill! What does it all mean? [BILL, *looking from side to side, only shrugs his shoulders*] You are *not* in love with her now. It's no good telling me you are.

BILL. I am.

LADY CHESHIRE. That's not exactly how you would speak if you were.

BILL. She's in love with me.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Bitterly*] I suppose so.

BILL. I mean to see that nobody runs her down.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*With difficulty*] Bill! Am I a hard, or mean woman?

BILL. Mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. It's all your life—and—your father's—and—all of us. I want to understand—I must understand. Have you realised what an awful thing this would be for us all? It's quite impossible that it should go on.

BILL. I'm always in hot water with the Governor, as it is. She and I'll take good care not to be in the way.

LADY CHESHIRE. Tell me everything!

BILL. I have.

LADY CHESHIRE. I'm your mother, Bill.

BILL. What's the good of these questions?

LADY CHESHIRE. You won't give her away—I see!

BILL. I've told you all there is to tell. We're engaged, we shall be married quietly, and—and—go to Canada.

LADY CHESHIRE. If there weren't more than that to tell you'd be in love with her now.

BILL. I've told you that I am.

LADY CHESHIRE. You are *not*. [*Almost fiercely*] I *know*—I *know* there's more behind.

BILL. There—is—nothing.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Baffled, but unconvinced*] Do you mean that your love for her has been just what it might have been for a lady?

BILL. [*Bitterly*] Why not?

LADY CHESHIRE. [*With painful irony*] It is not so as a rule.

BILL. Up to now I've never heard you or the girls say a word against Freda. This isn't the moment to begin, please.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Solemnly*] All such marriages end in wretchedness. You haven't a taste or tradition in common. You don't know what marriage is. Day after day, year after year. It's no use being sentimental—for people brought up as we are to have different manners is worse than to have different souls. Besides, it's poverty. Your father will never forgive you, and *I've* practically nothing. What can you do? You have no profession. How are you going to stand it; with a woman who——? It's the little things.

BILL. I know all that, thanks.

LADY CHESHIRE. Nobody does till they've been through it. Marriage is hard enough when people are of the same class. [*With a sudden movement towards him*] Oh! my dear—before it's too late!

BILL. [*After a struggle*] It's no good.

LADY CHESHIRE. It's not fair to her. It *can* only end in her misery.

BILL. Leave that to me, please.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*With an almost angry vehemence*] Only the very finest can do such things. And you—don't even know what trouble's like.

BILL. Drop it, please, mother.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill, on your word of honour, are you acting of your own free will?

BILL. [*Breaking away from her*] I can't stand any more. [*He goes out into the workroom.*

LADY CHESHIRE. What in God's name shall I do?

In her distress she walks up and down the room, then goes to the workroom door, and opens it.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come in here, please, Freda.

After a second's pause, FREDA, *white and trembling, appears in the doorway, followed by* BILL.

LADY CHESHIRE. No, Bill. I want to speak to her alone.

BILL *does not move.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Icily*] I must ask you to leave us.

BILL *hesitates; then shrugging his shoulders, he touches* FREDA'S *arms, and goes back into the workroom, closing the door. There is silence.*

LADY CHESHIRE. How did it come about?

FREDA. I don't know, my lady.

LADY CHESHIRE. For heaven's sake, child, don't call me that again, whatever happens. [*She walks to the window, and speaks from there*] I know well enough how love comes. I don't blame you. Don't cry. But, you see, it's my eldest son. [FREDA *puts her hand to her breast*] Yes, I know. Women always get the worst of these things. That's natural. But it's not only you—is it? Does any one guess?

FREDA. No.

LADY CHESHIRE. Not even your father? [FREDA *shakes her head*] There's nothing more dreadful than for a woman to hang like a stone round a man's neck. How far has it gone? Tell me!

FREDA. I can't.

LADY CHESHIRE. Come!

FREDA. I—won't.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Smiling painfully*]. Won't give him away? Both of you the same. What's the use of that with me? Look at me! Wasn't he with you when you went for your holiday this summer?

FREDA. He's—always—behaved—like—a—gentleman.

LADY CHESHIRE. Like a *man*—you mean!

FREDA. It hasn't been his fault! I love him so.

LADY CHESHIRE *turns abruptly, and begins to walk up and down the room. Then stopping, she looks intently at* FREDA.

LADY CHESHIRE. I don't know what to say to you. It's simple madness! It can't, and shan't go on.

FREDA. [*Sullenly*] I know I'm not his equal, but I am—somebody.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Answering this first assertion of rights with a sudden steeliness*] Does he love you *now?*

FREDA. That's not fair—it's not fair.

LADY CHESHIRE. If men are like gunpowder, Freda, women are not. If you've lost him it's been your own fault.

FREDA. But he *does* love me, he must. It's only four months.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Looking down, and speaking rapidly*] Listen to me. I love my son, but I know him—I know all his kind of man. I've lived with one for thirty years. I know the way their senses work. When they

want a thing they must have it, and then—they're sorry.

FREDA. [*Sullenly*] He's *not* sorry.

LADY CHESHIRE. Is his love big enough to carry you both over everything? . . . You know it isn't.

FREDA. If I were a lady, you wouldn't talk like that.

LADY CHESHIRE. If you were a lady there'd be no trouble before either of you. You'll make him hate you.

FREDA. I won't believe it. I could make him happy —out there.

LADY CHESHIRE. I don't want to be so odious as to say all the things you must know. I only ask you to try and put yourself in our position.

FREDA. Ah, yes!

LADY CHESHIRE. You ought to know me better than to think I'm purely selfish.

FREDA. Would you like to put yourself in my position? [*She throws up her head.*

LADY CHESHIRE. What!

FREDA. Yes. Just like Rose.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*In a low, horror-stricken voice*] Oh!

There is a dead silence, then going swiftly up to her, she looks straight into FREDA'S *eyes.*

FREDA. [*Meeting her gaze*] Oh! Yes—it's the truth. [*Then to Bill who has come in from the workroom, she gasps out*] I never meant to tell.

BILL. Well, are you satisfied?

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Below her breath*] This is terrible!

BILL. The Governor had better know.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! no; not yet!

BILL. Waiting won't cure it!

The door from the corridor is thrown open; CHRISTINE *and* DOT *run in with their copies of the play in their hands; seeing that something is wrong, they stand still. After a look at his mother,* BILL *turns abruptly, and goes back into the workroom.* LADY CHESHIRE *moves towards the window.*

JOAN. [*Following her sisters*] The car's round. What's the matter?

DOT. Shut up!

SIR WILLIAM'S *voice is heard from the corridor calling "Dorothy!" As* LADY CHESHIRE, *passing her handkerchief over her face, turns round, he enters. He is in full hunting dress: well-weathered pink, buckskins, and mahogany tops.*

SIR WILLIAM. Just off, my dear. [*To his daughters, genially*] Rehearsin'? What! [*He goes up to* FREDA *holding out his gloved right hand*] Button that for me, Freda, would you? It's a bit stiff!

FREDA *buttons the glove:* LADY CHESHIRE *and the girls watching in hypnotic silence.*

SIR WILLIAM. Thank you! "Balmy as May"; scent ought to be first-rate. [*To* LADY CHESHIRE] Good-bye, my dear! Sampson's Gorse—best day of the whole year. [*He pats* JOAN *on the shoulder*] Wish you were comin' out, Joan.

He goes out, leaving the door open, and as his footsteps and the chink of his spurs die away, FREDA *turns and rushes into the workroom.*

CHRISTINE. Mother! What——?

But LADY CHESHIRE *waves the question aside, passes her daughter, and goes out into the corridor. The sound of a motor car is heard.*

JOAN. [*Running to the window*] They've started—! —Chris! What is it? Dot?

DOT. Bill, and her!

JOAN. But *what?*

DOT. [*Gloomily*] Heaven knows! Go away, you're not fit for this.

JOAN. [*Aghast*] I am fit.

DOT. I think not.

JOAN. Chris?

CHRISTINE. [*In a hard voice*] Mother ought to have told us.

JOAN. It can't be very awful. Freda's so *good.*

DOT. Call yourself in love, you milk-and-water—kitten!

CHRISTINE. It's horrible, not knowing anything! I *wish* Ronny hadn't gone.

JOAN. Shall I fetch John?

DOT. John!

CHRISTINE. Perhaps Harold knows.

JOAN. He went out with Studdenham.

DOT. It's always like this, women kept in blinkers. Rose-leaves and humbug! That awful old man!

JOAN. Dot!

CHRISTINE. Don't talk of father like that!

DOT. Well, he is! And Bill will be just like him at fifty! Heaven help Freda, whatever she's done! I'd

sooner be a private in a German regiment than a woman.

JOAN. Dot, you're awful.

DOT. You—mouse-hearted—linnet!

CHRISTINE. Don't talk that nonsense about women!

DOT. You're married and out of it; and Ronny's not one of these terrific John Bulls. [*To* JOAN *who has opened the door*] Looking for John? No good, my dear; lath and plaster.

JOAN. [*From the door, in a frightened whisper*] Here's Mabel!

DOT. Heavens, and the waters under the earth!

CHRISTINE. If we only *knew!*

As MABEL *comes in, the three girls are silent, with their eyes fixed on their books.*

MABEL. The silent company.

DOT. [*Looking straight at her*] We're chucking it for to-day.

MABEL. What's the matter?

CHRISTINE. Oh! nothing.

DOT. Something's happened.

MABEL. Really! I *am* sorry. [*Hesitating*] Is it bad enough for me to go?

CHRISTINE. Oh! no, Mabel!

DOT. [*Sardonically*] I should think very likely.

While she is looking from face to face, BILL *comes in from the workroom. He starts to walk across the room, but stops, and looks stolidly at the four girls.*

BILL. Exactly! Fact of the matter is, Miss Lanfarne, I'm engaged to my mother's maid.

No one moves or speaks. Suddenly MABEL LANFARNE *goes towards him, holding out her hand.* BILL *does not take her hand, but bows. Then after a swift glance at the girls' faces* MABEL *goes out into the corridor, and the three girls are left staring at their brother.*

BILL. [*Coolly*] Thought you might like to know.

[*He, too, goes out into the corridor.*

CHRISTINE. Great heavens!

JOAN. How *awful!*

CHRISTINE. I never thought of anything as bad as that.

JOAN. Oh! Chris! Something must be done!

DOT. [*Suddenly to herself*] Ha! When Father went up to have his glove buttoned!

There is a sound, JACKSON *has come in from the corridor.*

JACKSON. [*To* DOT] If you please, Miss, Studdenham's brought up the other two pups. He's just outside. Will you kindly take a look at them, he says?

There is silence.

DOT. [*Suddenly*] We can't.

CHRISTINE. Not just now, Jackson.

JACKSON. Is Studdenham and the pups to wait, M'm?

DOT *shakes her head violently. But* STUDDENHAM *is seen already standing in the doorway, with a spaniel puppy in either side-pocket. He comes in, and* JACKSON *stands waiting behind him.*

STUDDENHAM. This fellow's the best, Miss Dot. [*He protrudes the right-hand pocket*] I was keeping him for my girl—a proper breedy one—takes after his father.

The girls stare at him in silence.

DOT. [*Hastily*] Thanks, Studdenham, I see.

STUDDENHAM. I won't take 'em out in here. They're rather bold yet.

CHRISTINE. [*Desperately*] No, no, of course.

STUDDENHAM. Then you think you'd like him, Miss Dot? The other's got a white chest; she's a lady.

[*He protrudes the left-hand pocket.*

DOT. Oh, yes! Studdenham; thanks, thanks awfully.

STUDDENHAM. Wonderful faithful creatures; follow you like a woman. You can't shake 'em off anyhow. [*He protrudes the right-hand pocket*] My girl, she'd set her heart on *him*, but she'll just have to do without.

DOT. [*As though galvanised*] Oh! no, I can't take it away from *her*.

STUDDENHAM. Bless you, she won't mind! That's settled, then. [*He turns to the door. To the* PUPPY] Ah! would you! Tryin' to wriggle out of it! Regular young limb! [*He goes out, followed by* JACKSON.

CHRISTINE. How ghastly!

DOT. [*Suddenly catching sight of the book in her hand*] "Caste!" [*She gives vent to a short sharp laugh.*

The curtain falls.

ACT III

It is five o'clock of the same day. The scene is the smoking-room, with walls of Leander red, covered by old steeplechase and hunting prints. Armchairs encircle a high-fendered hearth, in which a fire is burning. The curtains are not yet drawn across mullioned windows; but electric light is burning. There are two doors, leading, the one to the billiard-room, the other to a corridor. BILL *is pacing up and down;* HAROLD, *at the fireplace, stands looking at him with commiseration.*

BILL. What's the time?

HAROLD. Nearly five. They won't be in yet, if that's any consolation. Always a tough meet—[*softly*] as the tiger said when he ate the man.

BILL. By Jove! You're the only person I can stand within a mile of me, Harold.

HAROLD. Old boy! Do you seriously think you're going to make it any better by marrying her?

[*Bill shrugs his shoulders, still pacing the room.*

BILL. Look here! I'm not the sort that finds it easy to say things.

HAROLD. No, old man.

BILL. But I've got a kind of self-respect though you wouldn't think it!

HAROLD. My dear old chap!

BILL. This is about as low-down a thing as one could have done, I suppose—one's own mother's maid; we've known her since she was so high. I see it now that—I've got over the attack.

HAROLD. But, heavens! if you're no longer keen on her, Bill! Do apply your reason, old boy.

There is silence; while BILL *again paces up and down.*

BILL. If you think I care two straws about the morality of the thing——

HAROLD. Oh! my dear old man! Of course not!

BILL. It's simply that I shall feel such a d—d skunk, if I leave her in the lurch, with everybody knowing. Try it yourself; you'd soon see!

HAROLD. Poor old chap!

BILL. It's not as if she'd tried to force me into it. And she's a soft little thing. Why I ever made such a sickening ass of myself, I can't think. I never meant—

HAROLD. No, I know! But, don't do anything rash, Bill; keep your head, old man!

BILL. I don't see what loss I should be, if I did clear out of the country. [*The sound of cannoning billiard balls is heard*] Who's that knocking the balls about?

HAROLD. John, I expect. [*The sound ceases.*

BILL. He's coming in here. Can't stand that!

As LATTER *appears from the billiard-room, he goes hurriedly out.*

LATTER. Was that Bill?

HAROLD. Yes.

LATTER. Well?

HAROLD. [*Pacing up and down in his turn*] Rat in a cage is a fool to him. This is the sort of thing you read of in books, John! What price your argument with Ronny now? Well, it's not too late for *you* luckily.

LATTER. What do you mean?

HAROLD. You needn't connect yourself with this eccentric family!

LATTER. I'm not a bounder, Harold.

HAROLD. Good!

LATTER. It's terrible for your sisters.

HAROLD. Deuced lucky we haven't a lot of people staying here! Poor mother! John, I feel awfully bad about this. If something isn't done, pretty mess I shall be in.

LATTER. How?

HAROLD. There's no entail. If the Governor cuts Bill off, it'll all come to me.

LATTER. Oh!

HAROLD. Poor old Bill! I say, the play! Nemesis! What? Moral! Caste don't matter. Got us fairly on the hop.

LATTER. It's too bad of Bill. It really is. He's behaved disgracefully.

HAROLD. [*Warmly*] Well! There are thousands of fellows who'd never dream of sticking to the girl, considering what it means.

LATTER. Perfectly disgusting!

HAROLD. Hang you, John! Haven't you any human sympathy? Don't you know how these things come about? It's like a spark in a straw-yard.

LATTER. One doesn't take lighted pipes into straw-yards unless one's an idiot, or worse.

HAROLD. H'm! [*With a grin*] *You're* not allowed to-bacco. In the good old days no one would have thought anything of this. My great-grandfather——

LATTER. Spare me your great-grandfather.

HAROLD. I could tell you of at least a dozen men I know who've been through this same business, and got off scot-free; and now because Bill's going to play the game, it'll smash him up.

LATTER. Why didn't he play the game at the begin-ning?

HAROLD. I can't stand your sort, John. When a thing like this happens, all you can do is to cry out: Why didn't he—? Why didn't she—? What's to be *done*—that's the point!

LATTER. Of course he'll have to——

HAROLD. Ha!

LATTER. What do you mean by—that?

HAROLD. Look here, John! You feel in your bones that a marriage'll be hopeless, just as I do, knowing Bill and the girl and everything! Now don't you?

LATTER. The whole thing is—is most unfortunate.

HAROLD. By Jove! I should think it was!

As he speaks CHRISTINE *and* KEITH *come in from the billiard-room. He is still in splashed hunting clothes, and looks exceptionally weath-ered, thin-lipped, reticent. He lights a cigarette and sinks into an armchair. Behind them* DOT *and* JOAN *have come stealing in.*

CHRISTINE. I've told Ronny.

JOAN. This waiting for father to be told is awful.

HAROLD. [*To* KEITH] Where did you leave the old man?

KEITH. Clackenham. He'll be home in ten minutes.

DOT. Mabel's going. [*They all stir, as if at fresh consciousness of discomfiture*]. She walked into Gracely and sent herself a telegram.

HAROLD. Phew!

DOT. And we shall say good-bye, as if nothing had happened!

HAROLD. It's up to you, Ronny.

KEITH, *looking at* JOAN, *slowly emits smoke; and* LATTER *passing his arm through* JOAN'S, *draws her away with him into the billiard-room.*

KEITH. Dot?

DOT. *I'm* not a squeamy squirrel.

KEITH. Anybody seen the girl since?

DOT. Yes.

HAROLD. Well?

DOT. She's just sitting there.

CHRISTINE. [*In a hard voice*] As we're all doing.

DOT. She's so soft, that's what's so horrible. If one could only feel——!

KEITH. She's got to face the music like the rest of us.

DOT. Music! Squeaks! Ugh! The whole thing's like a concertina, and some one jigging it!

They all turn as the door opens, and a FOOTMAN *enters with a tray of whiskey, gin, lemons, and soda water. In dead silence the* FOOTMAN *puts the tray down.*

HAROLD. [*Forcing his voice*] Did you get a run, Ronny? [*As* KEITH *nods*] What point?

KEITH. Eight mile.

FOOTMAN. Will you take tea, sir?

KEITH. No, thanks, Charles!

In dead silence again the FOOTMAN *goes out, and they all look after him.*

HAROLD. [*Below his breath*] Good Gad! That's a squeeze of it!

KEITH. What's our line of country to be?

CHRISTINE. All depends on father.

KEITH. Sir William's between the devil and the deep sea, as it strikes me.

CHRISTINE. He'll simply forbid it utterly, of course.

KEITH. H'm! Hard case! Man who reads family prayers, and lessons on Sunday forbids son to——

CHRISTINE. Ronny!

KEITH. Great Scott! I'm not saying Bill ought to marry her. She's got to stand the racket. But your Dad will have a tough job to take up that position.

DOT. Awfully funny!

CHRISTINE. What on earth d'you mean, Dot?

DOT. Morality in one eye, and your title in the other!

CHRISTINE. Rubbish!

HAROLD. You're all reckoning without your Bill.

KEITH. Ye-es. Sir William can cut him off; no mortal power can help the title going down, if Bill chooses to be such a——

[*He draws in his breath with a sharp hiss.*

HAROLD. I won't take what Bill ought to have; nor would any of you girls, I should think——

CHRISTINE *and* DOT. Of course not!

KEITH. [*Patting his wife's arm*] Hardly the point, is it?

DOT. If it wasn't for mother! Freda's just as much of a lady as most girls. Why shouldn't he marry her, and go to Canada? It's what he's really fit for.

HAROLD. Steady on, Dot!

DOT. Well, imagine him in Parliament! That's what he'll come to, if he stays here—jolly for the country!

CHRISTINE. Don't be cynical! We must find a way of stopping Bill.

DOT. *Me* cynical!

CHRISTINE. Let's go and beg him, Ronny!

KEITH. No earthly! The only hope is in the girl.

DOT. She hasn't the stuff in her!

HAROLD. I say! What price young Dunning! Right about face! Poor old Dad!

CHRISTINE. It's past joking, Harold!

DOT. [*Gloomily*] Old Studdenham's better than most relations by marriage!

KEITH. Thanks!

CHRISTINE. It's ridiculous—monstrous! It's fantastic!

HAROLD. [*Holding up his hand*] There's his horse going round. He's in!

They turn from listening to the sound, to see LADY CHESHIRE *coming from the billiard-room. She is very pale. They all rise and* DOT *puts an*

arm round her; while KEITH *pushes forward his chair.* JOAN *and* LATTER *too have come stealing back.*

LADY CHESHIRE. Thank you, Ronny!

[*She sits down.*

DOT. Mother, you're shivering! Shall I get you a fur?

LADY CHESHIRE. No, thanks, dear!

DOT. [*In a low voice*] Play up, mother darling!

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Straightening herself*] What sort of a run, Ronny?

KEITH. Quite fair, M'm. Brazier's to Caffyn's Dyke, good straight line.

LADY CHESHIRE. And the young horse?

KEITH. Carries his ears in your mouth a bit, that's all. [*Putting his hand on her shoulder*] Cheer up, Mem-Sahib!

CHRISTINE. Mother, *must* anything be said to father? Ronny thinks it all depends on *her*. Can't you use your influence? [LADY CHESHIRE *shakes her head.*

CHRISTINE. But, mother, it's desperate.

DOT. Shut up, Chris! Of course mother can't. We simply couldn't beg her to let us off!

CHRISTINE. There must be *some* way. What do you think in your heart, mother?

DOT. Leave mother alone!

CHRISTINE. It must be faced, now or never.

DOT. [*In a low voice*] Haven't you any self-respect?

CHRISTINE. We shall be the laughing-stock of the whole county. Oh! mother do speak to her! You

know it'll be misery for both of them. [LADY CHESHIRE *bows her head*] Well, then?

[LADY CHESHIRE *shakes her head.*

CHRISTINE. Not even for Bill's sake?

DOT. Chris!

CHRISTINE. Well, for heaven's sake, speak to Bill again, mother! We ought all to go on our knees to him.

LADY CHESHIRE. He's with your father now.

HAROLD. Poor old Bill!

CHRISTINE. [*Passionately*] He didn't think of *us!* That wretched girl!

LADY CHESHIRE. Chris!

CHRISTINE. There are limits!

LADY CHESHIRE. Not to self-control.

CHRISTINE. No, mother! I can't—I never shall—Something must be done! You know what Bill is. He rushes at things so, when he gets his head down. Oh! do try! It's only fair to her, and all of us!

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Painfully*] There are things one can't do.

CHRISTINE. But it's Bill! I know you can make her give him up, if you'll only say all you can. And, after all, what's coming won't affect her as if she'd been a lady. Only *you* can do it, mother. Do back me up, all of you! It's the only way!

Hypnotised by their private longing for what CHRISTINE *has been urging they have all fixed their eyes on* LADY CHESHIRE, *who looks from face to face, and moves her hands as if in physical pain.*

CHRISTINE. [*Softly*] Mother!

LADY CHESHIRE *suddenly rises, looking towards the billiard-room door, listening. They all follow her eyes. She sits down again, passing her hand over her lips, as* SIR WILLIAM *enters. His hunting clothes are splashed; his face very grim and set. He walks to the fire without a glance at any one, and stands looking down into it. Very quietly, every one but* LADY CHESHIRE *steals away.*

LADY CHESHIRE. What have you done?

SIR WILLIAM. *You* there!

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't keep me in suspense!

SIR WILLIAM. The fool! My God! Dorothy! I didn't think I had a blackguard for a son, who was a fool into the bargain.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Rising*] If he were a blackguard he would not be what you call a fool.

SIR WILLIAM. [*After staring angrily, makes her a slight bow*] Very well!

LADY CHESHIRE. [*In a low voice*] Bill, don't be harsh. It's all too terrible.

SIR WILLIAM. Sit down, my dear.

[*She resumes her seat, and he turns back to the fire.*

SIR WILLIAM. In all my life I've never been face to face with a thing like this. [*Gripping the mantelpiece so hard that his hands and arms are seen shaking*] You ask me to be calm. I am trying to be. Be good enough in turn not to take his part against me.

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill!

SIR WILLIAM. I am trying to think. I understand that you've known this—piece of news since this morning. I've known it ten minutes. Give me a little time, please. [*Then, after a silence*] Where's the girl?

LADY CHESHIRE. In the workroom.

SIR WILLIAM. [*Raising his clenched fist*] What in God's name is he about?

LADY CHESHIRE. What have you said to him?

SIR WILLIAM. Nothing—by a miracle. [*He breaks away from the fire and walks up and down*] My family goes back to the thirteenth century. Nowadays they laugh at that! I don't! Nowadays they laugh at everything—they even laugh at the word lady—I married *you*, and I don't. . . . Married his mother's maid! By George! Dorothy! I don't know what we've done to deserve this; it's a death blow! I'm not prepared to sit down and wait for it. By Gad! I am not. [*With sudden fierceness*] There are plenty in these days who'll be glad enough for this to happen; plenty of these d——d Socialists and Radicals, who'll laugh their souls out over what they haven't the bowels to see's a—tragedy. I say it *would* be a tragedy; for you, and me, and all of us. You and I were brought up, and we've brought the children up, with certain beliefs, and wants, and habits. A man's past—his traditions—he can't get rid of them. They're—they're himself! [*Suddenly*] It shan't go on.

LADY CHESHIRE. What's to prevent it?

SIR WILLIAM. I utterly forbid this piece of madness. I'll stop it.

LADY CHESHIRE. But the thing we can't stop.

SIR WILLIAM. Provision must be made.

LADY CHESHIRE. The unwritten law!

SIR WILLIAM. What! [*Suddenly perceiving what she is alluding to*] You're thinking of young—young——[*Shortly*] I don't see the connection.

LADY CHESHIRE. What's so awful, is that the boy's trying to do what's loyal—and we—his father and mother—!

SIR WILLIAM. I'm not going to see my eldest son ruin his life. I must think this out.

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Beneath her breath*] I've tried that—it doesn't help.

SIR WILLIAM. This girl, who was born on the estate, had the run of the house—brought up with money earned from me—nothing but kindness from all of us; she's broken the common rules of gratitude and decency—she lured him on, I haven't a doubt!

LADY CHESHIRE. [*To herself*] In a way, I suppose.

SIR WILLIAM. What! It's ruin. We've always been here. Who the deuce are we if we leave this place? D'you think we could stay? Go out and meet everybody just as if nothing had happened? Good-bye to any prestige, political, social, or anything! This is the sort of business nothing can get over. I've seen it before. As to that other matter—it's soon forgotten—constantly happening—Why, my own grandfather——!

LADY CHESHIRE. Does he help?

SIR WILLIAM. [*Stares before him in silence—suddenly*] You must go to the girl. She's soft. She'll never hold out against you.

LADY CHESHIRE. I did before I knew what was in front of her—I said all I could. I can't go again now. I can't do it, Bill.

SIR WILLIAM. What *are* you going to do, then—fold your hands? [*Then as* LADY CHESHIRE *makes a movement of distress.*] If he marries her, I've done with him. As far as I'm concerned he'll cease to exist. The title—I can't help. My God! Does that meet your wishes?

LADY CHESHIRE. [*With sudden fire*] You've no right to put such an alternative to me. I'd give ten years of my life to prevent this marriage. I'll go to Bill. I'll beg him on my knees.

SIR WILLIAM. Then why can't you go to the girl? She deserves no consideration. It's not a question of morality. Morality be d——d!

LADY CHESHIRE. But not self-respect.

SIR WILLIAM. What! You're his mother!

LADY CHESHIRE. I've tried; I [*putting her hand to her throat*] can't get it out.

SIR WILLIAM. [*Staring at her*] You won't go to her? It's the only chance. [LADY CHESHIRE *turns away.*

SIR WILLIAM. In the whole course of our married life, Dorothy, I've never known you set yourself up against me. I resent this, I warn you—I resent it. Send the girl to me. I'll do it myself.

With a look back at him LADY CHESHIRE *goes out into the corridor.*

SIR WILLIAM. This is a nice end to my day!

He takes a small china cup from off the mantelpiece; it breaks with the pressure of his hand,

and falls into the fireplace. While he stands looking at it blankly, there is a knock.

SIR WILLIAM. Come in!

FREDA *enters from the corridor.*

SIR WILLIAM. I've asked you to be good enough to come, in order that—[*pointing to chair*] You may sit down.

But though she advances two or three steps, she does not sit down.

SIR WILLIAM. This is a sad business.

FREDA. [*Below her breath*] Yes, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. [*Becoming conscious of the depths of feeling before him*] I—er—are you attached to my son?

FREDA. [*In a whisper*] Yes.

SIR WILLIAM. It's very painful to me to have to do this. [*He turns away from her and speaks to the fire.* I sent for you—to—ask—[*quickly*] How old are you?

FREDA. Twenty-two.

SIR WILLIAM. [*More resolutely*] Do you expect me to —sanction such a mad idea as a marriage?

FREDA. I don't expect anything.

SIR WILLIAM. You know—you haven't earned the right to be considered.

FREDA. Not yet!

SIR WILLIAM. What! That oughtn't to help you! On the contrary. Now brace yourself up, and listen to me!

She stands waiting to hear her sentence. SIR WILLIAM *looks at her; and his glance gradually wavers.*

SIR WILLIAM. I've not a word to say for m· son. He's behaved like a scamp.

FREDA. Oh! no!

SIR WILLIAM. [*With a silencing gesture*] At the same time— What made you forget yourself? You've no excuse, you know.

FREDA. No.

SIR WILLIAM. You'll deserve all you'll get. Confound it! To expect me to— It's intolerable! Do you know where my son is?

FREDA. [*Faintly*] I think he's in the billiard-room with my lady.

SIR WILLIAM. [*With renewed resolution*] I wanted to —to put it to you—as a—as a—what! [*Seeing her stand so absolutely motionless, looking at him, he turns abruptly, and opens the billiard-room door*] I'll speak to him first. Come in here, please! [*To* FREDA] Go in, and wait!

LADY CHESHIRE *and* BILL *come in, and* FREDA *passing them, goes into the billiard-room to wait.*

SIR WILLIAM. [*Speaking with a pause between each sentence*] Your mother and I have spoken of this—calamity. I imagine that even you have some dim perception of the monstrous nature of it. I must tell you this: If you do this mad thing, you fend for yourself. You'll receive nothing from me now or hereafter. I consider that only due to the position our family has always held here. Your brother will take your place. We shall get on as best we can without you. [*There is a dead silence, till he adds sharply*] Well!

BILL. I shall marry her.

LADY CHESHIRE. Oh! Bill! Without love—without anything!

BILL. All right, mother! [*To* SIR WILLIAM] You've mistaken your man, sir. Because I'm a rotter in one way, I'm not necessarily a rotter in all. You put the butt end of the pistol to Dunning's head yesterday, you put the other end to mine to-day. Well! [*He turns round to go out*] Let the d—d thing off!

LADY CHESHIRE. Bill!

BILL. [*Turning to her*] I'm not going to leave her in the lurch.

SIR WILLIAM. Do me the justice to admit that I have not attempted to persuade you to.

BILL. No! you've chucked me out. I don't see what else you could have done under the circumstances. It's quite all right. But if you wanted me to throw her over, father, you went the wrong way to work, that's all; neither you nor I are very good at seeing consequences.

SIR WILLIAM. Do you realise your position?

BILL. [*Grimly*] I've a fair notion of it.

SIR WILLIAM. [*With a sudden outburst*] You have none—not the faintest, brought up as you've been.

BILL. I didn't bring myself up.

SIR WILLIAM. [*With a movement of uncontrolled anger, to which his son responds*] You—ungrateful young dog!

LADY CHESHIRE. How can you—both?

[*They drop their eyes, and stand silent.*

SIR WILLIAM. [*With grimly suppressed emotion*] I am speaking under the stress of very great pain—some consideration is due to me. This is a disaster which I never

expected to have to face. It is a matter which I naturally can never hope to forget. I shall carry this down to my death. We shall all of us do that. I have had the misfortune all my life to believe in our position here —to believe that we counted for something—that the country wanted us. I have tried to do my duty by that position. I find in one moment that it is gone—smoke —gone. My philosophy is not equal to that. To countenance this marriage would be unnatural.

BILL. I know. I'm sorry. I've got her into this— I don't see any other way out. It's a bad business for me, father, as well as for you——

He stops, seeing that JACKSON *has come in, and is standing there waiting.*

JACKSON. Will you speak to Studdenham, Sir William? It's about young Dunning.

After a moment of dead silence, SIR WILLIAM *nods, and the butler withdraws.*

BILL. [*Stolidly*] He'd better be told.

SIR WILLIAM. He shall be.

STUDDENHAM *enters, and touches his forehead to them all with a comprehensive gesture.*

STUDDENHAM. Good evenin', my lady! Evenin', Sir William!

STUDDENHAM. Glad to be able to tell you, the young man's to do the proper thing. Asked me to let you know, Sir William. Banns'll be up next Sunday. [*Struck by the silence, he looks round at all three in turn, and suddenly seeing that* LADY CHESHIRE *is shivering*] Beg pardon, my lady, you're shakin' like a leaf!

BILL. [*Blurting it out*] I've a painful piece of news for you, Studdenham; I'm engaged to your daughter. We're to be married at once.

STUDDENHAM. I—don't—understand you—sir.

BILL. The fact is, I've behaved badly; but I mean to put it straight.

STUDDENHAM. I'm a little deaf. Did you say—my daughter?

SIR WILLIAM. There's no use mincing matters, Studdenham. It's a thunderbolt—young Dunning's case over again.

STUDDENHAM. I don't rightly follow. She's—You've—! I must see my daughter. Have the goodness to send for her, m'lady.

LADY CHESHIRE *goes to the billiard-room, and calls:* "FREDA, *come here, please.*"

STUDDENHAM. [*To* SIR WILLIAM] You tell me that my daughter's in the position of that girl owing to your son? Men ha' been shot for less.

BILL. If you like to have a pot at me, Studdenham—you're welcome.

STUDDENHAM. [*Averting his eyes from* BILL *at the sheer idiocy of this sequel to his words*] I've been in your service five and twenty years, Sir William; but this is man to man—this is!

SIR WILLIAM. I don't deny that, Studdenham.

STUDDENHAM. [*With eyes shifting in sheer anger*] No—'twouldn't be very easy. Did I understand him to say that he offers her marriage?

SIR WILLIAM. You did.

STUDDENHAM. [*Into his beard*] Well—that's something! [*Moving his hands as if wringing the neck of a bird*] I'm tryin' to see the rights o' this.

SIR WILLIAM. [*Bitterly*] You've all your work cut out for you, Studdenham.

Again STUDDENHAM *makes the unconscious wringing movement with his hands.*

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Turning from it with a sort of horror*] Don't, Studdenham! Please!

STUDDENHAM. What's that, m'lady?

LADY CHESHIRE. [*Under her breath*] Your—your—hands.

While STUDDENHAM *is still staring at her,* FREDA *is seen standing in the doorway, like a black ghost.*

STUDDENHAM. Come here! You! [FREDA *moves a few steps towards her father*] When did you start this?

FREDA. [*Almost inaudibly*] In the summer, father.

LADY CHESHIRE. Don't be harsh to her!

STUDDENHAM. Harsh! [*His eyes again move from side to side as if pain and anger had bewildered them. Then looking sideways at* FREDA, *but in a gentler voice*] And when did you tell him about—what's come to you?

FREDA. Last night.

STUDDENHAM. Oh! [*With sudden menace*] You young——! [*He makes a convulsive movement of one hand; then, in the silence, seems to lose grip of his thoughts, and puts his hand up to his head*] I want to

clear me mind a bit—I don't see it plain at all. [*Without looking at* BILL] 'Tis said there's been an offer of marriage?

BILL. I've made it, I stick to it.

STUDDENHAM. Oh! [*With slow, puzzled anger*] I want time to get the pith o' this. You don't say anything, Sir William?

SIR WILLIAM. The facts are all before you.

STUDDENHAM. [*Scarcely moving his lips*] M'lady?

[LADY CHESHIRE *is silent.*

STUDDENHAM. [*Stammering*] My girl was—was good enough for any man. It's not for him that's—that's—to look down on her. [*To* FREDA] You hear the handsome offer that's been made you? Well? [FREDA *moistens her lips and tries to speak, but cannot*] If nobody's to speak a word, we won't get much forrarder. I'd like for you to say what's in your mind, Sir William.

SIR WILLIAM. I—If my son marries her he'll have to make his own way.

STUDDENHAM. [*Savagely*] I'm not puttin' thought to that.

SIR WILLIAM. I didn't suppose you were, Studdenham. It appears to rest with your daughter. [*He suddenly takes out his handkerchief, and puts it to his forehead*] Infernal fires they make up here!

LADY CHESHIRE, *who is again shivering desperately, as if with intense cold, makes a violent attempt to control her shuddering.*

STUDDENHAM. [*Suddenly*] There's luxuries that's got to be paid for. [*To* FREDA] Speak up, now.

FREDA *turns slowly and looks up at* SIR WILLIAM; *he involuntarily raises his hand to his mouth. Her eyes travel on to* LADY CHESHIRE, *who faces her, but so deadly pale that she looks as if she were going to faint. The girl's gaze passes on to* BILL, *standing rigid, with his jaw set.*

FREDA. I want—[*Then flinging her arm up over her eyes, she turns from him*] *No!*

SIR WILLIAM. Ah!

At that sound of profound relief, STUDDENHAM, *whose eyes have been following his daughter's, moves towards* SIR WILLIAM, *all his emotion turned into sheer angry pride.*

STUDDENHAM. Don't be afraid, Sir William! We want none of you! She'll not force herself where she's not welcome. She may ha' slipped her good name, but she'll keep her proper pride. I'll have no *charity marriage* in my family.

SIR WILLIAM. Steady, Studdenham!

STUDDENHAM. If the young gentleman has tired of her in three months, as a blind man can see by the looks of him—she's not for him!

BILL. [*Stepping forward*] I'm ready to make it up to her.

STUDDENHAM. Keep back, there? [*He takes hold of* FREDA, *and looks around him*] Well! She's not the first this has happened to since the world began,

an' she won't be the last. Come away, now, come away!

Taking FREDA *by the shoulders, he guides her towards the door.*

SIR WILLIAM. D——n it, Studdenham! Give us credit for something!

STUDDENHAM. [*Turning—his face and eyes lighted up by a sort of smiling snarl*] Ah! I do that, Sir William. But there's things that can't be undone!

[*He follows* FREDA *out.*

As the door closes, SIR WILLIAM'S *calm gives way. He staggers past his wife, and sinks heavily, as though exhausted, into a chair by the fire.* BILL, *following* FREDA *and* STUDDENHAM, *has stopped at the shut door.* LADY CHESHIRE *moves swiftly close to him. The door of the billiard-room is opened, and* DOT *appears. With a glance round, she crosses quickly to her mother.*

DOT. [*In a low voice*] Mabel's just going, mother! [*Almost whispering*] Where's Freda? Is it—— Has she really had the pluck?

LADY CHESHIRE *bending her head for "Yes," goes out into the billiard-room.* DOT *clasps her hands together, and standing there in the middle of the room, looks from her brother to her father, from her father to her brother. A quaint little pitying smile comes on her lips. She gives a faint shrug of her shoulders.*

The curtain falls.

THE LITTLE DREAM

AN ALLEGORY IN SIX SCENES

CHARACTERS

SEELCHEN, *a mountain girl*
LAMOND, *a climber*
FELSMAN, *a guide*

CHARACTERS IN THE DREAM

THE GREAT HORN
THE COW HORN
THE WINE HORN
} *mountains*

THE EDELWEISS
THE ALPENROSE
THE GENTIAN
THE MOUNTAIN DANDELION
} *flowers*

VOICES AND FIGURES IN THE DREAM

COWBELLS
MOUNTAIN AIR
FAR VIEW OF ITALY
DISTANT FLUME OF STEAM
THINGS IN BOOKS
MOTH CHILDREN
THREE DANCING YOUTHS
THREE DANCING GIRLS
THE FORMS OF WORKERS
THE FORM OF WHAT IS MADE BY WORK
DEATH BY SLUMBER
DEATH BY DROWNING
FLOWER CHILDREN
GOATHERD
GOAT BOYS
GOAT GOD
THE FORMS OF SLEEP

SCENE I

It is just after sunset of an August evening. The scene is a room in a mountain hut, furnished only with a table, benches, and a low broad window seat. Through this window three rocky peaks are seen by the light of a moon, which is slowly whitening the last hues of sunset. An oil lamp is burning. SEELCHEN, *a mountain girl, eighteen years old, is humming a folk-song, and putting away in a cupboard freshly washed soup-bowls and glasses. She is dressed in a tight-fitting black velvet bodice, square-cut at the neck, and partly filled in with a gay handkerchief, coloured rose-pink, blue, and golden, like the alpen-rose, the gentian, and the mountain dandelion; alabaster beads, pale as edelweiss, are round her throat; her stiffened, white linen sleeves finish at the elbow; and her full well-worn skirt is of gentian blue. The two thick plaits of her hair are crossed, and turned round her head. As she puts away the last bowl, there is a knock; and* LAMOND *opens the outer door. He is young, tanned, and good-looking, dressed like a climber, and carries a plaid, a ruck-sack, and an ice-axe.*

LAMOND. Good evening!

SEELCHEN. Good evening, gentle Sir!

LAMOND. My name is Lamond. I'm very late I fear.

SEELCHEN. Do you wish to sleep here?

LAMOND. Please.

SEELCHEN. All the beds are full—it is a pity. I will call Mother.

LAMOND. I've come to go up the Great Horn at sunrise.

SEELCHEN. [*Awed*] The Great Horn! But he is impossible.

LAMOND. I am going to try that.

SEELCHEN. There is the Wine Horn, and the Cow Horn.

LAMOND. I have climbed them.

SEELCHEN. But he is so dangerous—it is perhaps—death.

LAMOND. Oh! that's all right! One must take one's chance.

SEELCHEN. And father has hurt his foot. For guide, there is only Hans Felsman.

LAMOND. The celebrated Felsman?

SEELCHEN. [*Nodding; then looking at him with admiration*] Are you that Herr Lamond who has climbed all our little mountains this year?

LAMOND. All but that big fellow.

SEELCHEN. We have heard of you. Will you not wait a day for father's foot?

LAMOND. Ah! no. I must go back home to-morrow.

SEELCHEN. The gracious Sir is in a hurry.

LAMOND. [*Looking at her intently*] Alas!

SEELCHEN. Are you from London? Is it very big?

LAMOND. Six million souls.

SEELCHEN. Oh! [*After a little pause*] I have seen Cortina twice.

LAMOND. Do you live here all the year?

SEELCHEN. In winter in the valley.

LAMOND. And don't you want to see the world?

SEELCHEN. Sometimes. [*Going to a door, she calls softly*] Hans! [*Then pointing to another door*] There are seven German gentlemen asleep in there!

LAMOND. Oh God!

SEELCHEN. Please? They are here to see the sunrise. [*She picks up a little book that has dropped from* LAMOND'S *pocket*] I have read several books.

LAMOND. This is by the great English poet. Do you never make poetry here, and dream dreams, among your mountains?

SEELCHEN. [*Slowly shaking her head*] See! It is the full moon.

While they stand at the window looking at the moon, there enters a lean, well-built, taciturn young man dressed in Loden.

SEELCHEN. Hans!

FELSMAN. [*In a deep voice*] The gentleman wishes me?

SEELCHEN. [*Awed*] The Great Horn for to-morrow! [*Whispering to him*] It is the celebrated London one.

FELSMAN. The Great Horn is not possible.

LAMOND. You say that? And you're the famous Felsman?

FELSMAN. [*Grimly*] We start at dawn.

SEELCHEN. It is the first time for years!

LAMOND. [*Placing his plaid and rucksack on the window bench*] Can I sleep here?

SEELCHEN. I will see; perhaps—

[*She runs out up some stairs*]

FELSMAN. [*Taking blankets from the cupboard and spreading them on the window seat*] So!

As he goes out into the air, SEELCHEN *comes slipping in again with a lighted candle.*

SEELCHEN. There is still one bed. This is too hard for you.

LAMOND. Oh! thanks; but that's all right.

SEELCHEN. To please me!

LAMOND. May I ask your name?

SEELCHEN. Seelchen.

LAMOND. Little soul, that means—doesn't it? To please you I would sleep with seven German gentlemen.

SEELCHEN. Oh! no; it is not necessary.

LAMOND. [*With a grave bow*] At your service, then. [*He prepares to go*].

SEELCHEN. Is it very nice in towns, in the World, where you come from?

LAMOND. When I'm there I would be here; but when I'm here I would be there.

SEELCHEN. [*Clasping her hands*] That is like me—but *I* am always *here*.

LAMOND. Ah! yes; there is no one like you in towns.

SEELCHEN. In two places one cannot be. [*Suddenly*] In the towns there are theatres, and there is beautiful fine work, and—dancing, and—churches—and trains—and all the things in books—and—

LAMOND. Misery.

SEELCHEN. But there is life.

LAMOND. And there is death.

SEELCHEN. To-morrow, when you have climbed—will you not come back?

LAMOND. No.

SEELCHEN. You have all the world; and I have nothing.

LAMOND. Except Felsman, and the mountains.

SEELCHEN. It is not good to eat only bread.

LAMOND. [*Looking at her hard*] *I* would like to eat *you!*

SEELCHEN. But I am not nice; I am full of big wants—like the cheese with holes.

LAMOND. I shall come again.

SEELCHEN. There will be no more hard mountains left to climb. And if it is not exciting, you do not care.

LAMOND. O wise little soul!

SEELCHEN. No. I am not wise. In here it is always aching.

LAMOND. For the moon?

SEELCHEN. Yes. [*Then suddenly*] From the big world you will remember?

LAMOND. [*Taking her hand*] There is nothing in the big world so sweet as this.

SEELCHEN. [*Wisely*] But there is the big world itself.

LAMOND. May I kiss you, for good-night?

She puts her face forward; and he kisses her cheek, and, suddenly, her lips. Then as she draws away.

LAMOND. I am sorry, little soul.

SEELCHEN. That's all right!

LAMOND. [*Taking the candle*] Dream well! Good-night!

SEELCHEN. [*Softly*] Good-night!

FELSMAN. [*Coming in from the air, and eyeing them*] It is cold—it will be fine.

LAMOND, *still looking back, goes up the stairs; and* FELSMAN *waits for him to pass.*

SEELCHEN. [*From the window seat*] It was hard for him here, I thought.

He goes up to her, stays a moment looking down, then bends and kisses her hungrily.

SEELCHEN. Art thou angry?

He does not answer, but turning out the lamp, goes into an inner room.

SEELCHEN *sits gazing through the window at the peaks bathed in full moonlight. Then, drawing the blankets about her, she snuggles down on the window seat.*

SEELCHEN. [*In a sleepy voice*] They kissed me—both. [*She sleeps*]

The scene falls quite dark.

SCENE II

The scene is slowly illumined as by dawn. SEELCHEN *is still lying on the window seat. She sits up, freeing her face and hands from the blankets, changing the swathings of deep sleep for the filmy coverings of a dream. The wall of the hut has vanished; there is nothing between her and the three mountains veiled in mist, save a trough of darkness. Then as the peaks of the mountains brighten, they are seen to have great faces.*

SEELCHEN. Oh! They have faces!

The face of THE WINE HORN *is the profile of a beardless youth. The face of* THE COW HORN *is that of a mountain shepherd, solemn, and brown, with fierce black eyes, and a black beard. Between them* THE GREAT HORN, *whose hair is of snow, has a high beardless visage, as of carved bronze, like a male sphinx, serene, without cruelty. Far down below the faces of the peaks, above the trough of darkness, are peeping out the four little heads of the flowers of* EDELWEISS, *and* GENTIAN, MOUNTAIN DANDELION, *and* ALPENROSE; *on their heads are crowns, made of their several flowers,*

all powdered with dewdrops; and when THE FLOWERS *lift their child-faces little tinkling bells ring.*

All around the peaks there is nothing but blue sky.

EDELWEISS. [*In a tiny voice*] Would you? Would you? Would you? Ah! ha!

GENTIAN, M. DANDELION, ALPENROSE [*With their bells ringing enviously*] Oo-oo-oo!

From behind the COW HORN *are heard the voices of* COWBELLS *and* MOUNTAIN AIR:

"*Clinkel-clink! Clinkel-clink!*"

"*Mountain air! Mountain air!*"

From behind THE WINE HORN *rise the rival voices of* VIEW OF ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM, *and* THINGS IN BOOKS:

"*I am Italy! Italy!*"

"*See me—steam in the distance!*"

"*O remember the things in books!*"

And all call out together, very softly, with THE FLOWERS *ringing their bells. Then far away like an echo comes a sighing:*

"*Mountain air! Mountain air!*"

And suddenly the Peak of THE COW HORN *speaks in a voice as of one unaccustomed.*

THE COW HORN. Amongst kine and my black-brown sheep I live; I am silence, and monotony; I am the solemn hills. I am fierceness, and the mountain wind; clean pasture, and wild rest. Look in my eyes, love *me* alone!

SEELCHEN. [*Breathless*] The Cow Horn! He is speaking—for Felsman and the mountains. It is the half of my heart!

THE FLOWERS *laugh happily.*

THE COW HORN. I stalk the eternal hills—I drink the mountain snows. My eyes are the colour of burned wine; in them lives melancholy. The lowing of the kine, the wind, the sound of falling rocks, the running of the torrents; no other talk know I. Thoughts simple, and blood hot, strength huge—the cloak of gravity.

SEELCHEN. Yes, yes! I want him. He is strong!

The voices of COWBELLS *and* MOUNTAIN AIR *cry out together:*

"Clinkel-clink! Clinkel-clink!"

"Mountain air! Mountain air!"

THE COW HORN. Little soul! Hold to me! Love me! Live with me under the stars!

SEELCHEN. [*Below her breath*] I am afraid.

And suddenly the Peak of THE WINE HORN *speaks in a youth's voice.*

THE WINE HORN. I am the will o' the wisp that dances thro' the streets; I am the cooing dove of Towns, from the plane trees and the chestnuts' shade. From day to day all changes, where I burn my incense to my thousand little gods. In white palaces I dwell, and passionate dark alleys. The life of men in crowds is mine—of lamplight in the streets at dawn. [*Softly*] I have a thousand loves, and never one too long; for I am nimbler than your heifers playing in the sunshine.

THE FLOWERS, *ringing in alarm, cry:*

"We know them!"

THE WINE HORN. I hear the rustlings of the birth and death of pleasure; and the rattling of swift wheels. I hear the hungry oaths of men; and love kisses in the airless night. Without *me*, little soul, you starve and die.

SEELCHEN. He is speaking for the gentle Sir, and the big world of the Town. It pulls my heart.

THE WINE HORN. My thoughts surpass in number the flowers in your meadows; they fly more swiftly than your eagles on the wind. I drink the wine of aspiration, and the drug of disillusion. Thus am I never dull!

The voices of VIEW OF ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM, *and* THINGS IN BOOKS *are heard calling out together:*

"I am Italy, Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember, remember!"

THE WINE HORN. Love *me*, little soul! I paint life fifty colours. I make a thousand pretty things! I twine about your heart!

SEELCHEN. He is honey!

THE FLOWERS *ring their bells jealously and cry:*

"Bitter! Bitter!"

THE COW HORN. *Stay* with me, Seelchen! I wake thee with the crystal air.

The voices of COWBELLS *and* MOUNTAIN AIR *sing out far away:*

"Clinkel-clink! Clinkel-clink!"
"Mountain air! Mountain air!"

And THE FLOWERS *laugh happily.*

THE WINE HORN. *Come* with me, Seelchen! My fan, Variety, shall wake you!

The voices of VIEW OF ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM, *and* THINGS IN BOOKS *chant softly:*

"I am Italy! Italy!"
"See me—steam in the distance!"
"O remember, remember!"

And THE FLOWERS *moan.*

SEELCHEN. [*In grief*] My heart! It is torn!

THE WINE HORN. With *me*, little soul, you shall race in the streets, and peep at all secrets. We will hold hands, and fly like the thistle-down.

M. DANDELION. My puff-balls fly faster!

THE WINE HORN. I will show you the sea.

GENTIAN. My blue is deeper!

THE WINE HORN. I will shower on you blushes.

ALPENROSE. I can blush redder!

THE WINE HORN. Little soul, listen! My Jewels! Silk! Velvet!

EDELWEISS. I am softer than velvet!

THE WINE HORN. [*Proudly*] My wonderful rags!

THE FLOWERS. [*Moaning*] Of those we have none.

SEELCHEN. He has all things.

THE COW HORN. Mine are the clouds with the dark silvered wings; mine are the rocks on fire with the sun; and the dewdrops cooler than pearls. Away from my

breath of snow and sweet grass, thou wilt droop, little soul.

THE WINE HORN. The dark Clove is *my* fragrance!

THE FLOWERS *ring eagerly, and turning up their faces, cry:*

"We too, smell sweet."

But the voices of VIEW OF ITALY, FLUME OF STEAM, *and* THINGS IN BOOKS *cry out:*

"I am Italy! Italy!"

"See me—steam in the distance!"

"O remember, remember!"

SEELCHEN. [*Distracted*] Oh! it is hard!

THE COW HORN. *I* will never desert thee.

THE WINE HORN. A hundred times *I* will desert you, a hundred times come back, and kiss you.

SEELCHEN. [*Whispering*] Peace for my heart!

THE COW HORN. With me thou shalt lie on the warm wild thyme.

THE FLOWERS *laugh happily.*

THE WINE HORN. With me you shall lie on a bed of dove's feathers.

THE FLOWERS *moan.*

THE WINE HORN. *I* will give you old wine.

THE COW HORN. *I* will give thee new milk.

THE WINE HORN. Hear my song!

From far away comes the sound as of mandolins.

SEELCHEN. [*Clasping her breast*] My heart—it is leaving me!

THE COW HORN. Hear my song!

From the distance floats the piping of a Shepherd's reed.

SEELCHEN. [*Curving her hand at her ears*] The piping! Ah!

THE COW HORN. *Stay* with me, Seelchen!

THE WINE HORN. *Come* with me, Seelchen!

THE COW HORN. I give thee certainty!

THE WINE HORN. I give you chance!

THE COW HORN. I give thee peace.

THE WINE HORN. I give you change.

THE COW HORN. I give thee stillness.

THE WINE HORN. I give you voice.

THE COW HORN. I give thee one love.

THE WINE HORN. I give you many.

SEELCHEN. [*As if the words were torn from her heart*] Both, both—I will love!

And suddenly the Peak of THE GREAT HORN *speaks.*

THE GREAT HORN. And both thou shalt love, little soul! Thou shalt lie on the hills with Silence; and dance in the cities with Knowledge. Both shall possess thee! The sun and the moon on the mountains shall burn thee; the lamps of the town singe thy wings, small Moth! Each shall seem all the world to thee, each shall seem as thy grave! Thy heart is a feather blown from one mouth to the other. But be not afraid! For the life of a man is for all loves in turn. 'Tis a little raft moored, then sailing out into the blue; a tune caught in a hush, then whispering on; a new-born

babe, half courage and half sleep. There is a hidden rhythm. Change, Quietude. Chance, Certainty. The One, The Many. Burn on—thou pretty flame, trying to eat the world! Thou shalt come to me at last, my little soul!

THE VOICES *and* THE FLOWER-BELLS *peal out.*

SEELCHEN, *enraptured, stretches her arms to embrace the sight and sound, but all fades slowly into dark sleep.*

SCENE III

The dark scene again becomes glamorous. SEELCHEN *is seen with her hand stretched out towards the Piazza of a little town, with a plane tree on one side, a wall on the other, and from the open doorway of an Inn a pale path of light. Over the Inn hangs a full golden moon. Against the wall, under the glimmer of a lamp, leans a youth with the face of* THE WINE HORN, *in a crimson cloak, thrumming a mandolin, and singing:*

"Little star soul
Through the frost fields of night
Roaming alone, disconsolate—
From out the cold
I call thee in—
Striking my dark mandolin—
Beneath this moon of gold."

From the Inn comes a burst of laughter, and the sound of dancing.

SEELCHEN. [*Whispering*] It is the big world!

The Youth of THE WINE HORN *sings on:*

"Pretty grey moth,
Where the strange candles shine,
Seeking for warmth, so desperate—

Ah! fluttering dove
I bid thee win—'
Striking my dark mandolin—
The crimson flame of love."

SEELCHEN. [*Gazing enraptured at the Inn*] They are dancing!

As SHE *speaks, from either side come moth-children, meeting and fluttering up the path of light to the Inn doorway; then wheeling aside, they form again, and again flutter forward.*

SEELCHEN. [*Holding out her hands*] They are real—Their wings are windy.

The Youth of THE WINE HORN *sings on:*

"Lips of my song,
To the white maiden's heart
Go ye, and whisper, passionate,
These words that burn—
'O listening one!
Love that flieth past is gone
Nor ever may return!'"

SEELCHEN *runs towards him—but the light above him fades; he has become shadow. She turns bewildered to the dancing moth-children —but they vanish before her. At the door of the Inn stands* LAMOND *in a dark cloak.*

SEELCHEN. It is *you*!

LAMOND. Without my little soul I am cold. Come! [*He holds out his arms to her*]

SEELCHEN. Shall I be safe?

LAMOND. What is safety? Are you safe in your mountains?

SEELCHEN. Where am I, here?

LAMOND. The Town.

Smiling he points to the doorway. And silent as shadows there come dancing out, two by two, two girls and two youths. The first girl is dressed in white satin and jewels; and the first youth in black velvet. The second girl is in rags, and a shawl; and the second youth in shirt and corduroys. They dance gravely, each couple as if in a world apart.

SEELCHEN. [*Whispering*] In the mountains all dance together. Do they never change partners?

LAMOND. How could they, little one? Those are rich, these poor. But see!

A CORYBANTIC COUPLE *come dancing forth. The girl has bare limbs, a flame-coloured shift, and hair bound with red flowers; the youth wears a panther-skin. They pursue not only each other, but the other girls and youths. For a moment all is a furious medley. Then the Corybantic Couple vanish into the Inn, and the first two couples are left, slowly, solemnly dancing, apart from each other as before.*

SEELCHEN. [*Shuddering*] Shall I one day dance like that?

The Youth of THE WINE HORN *appears again beneath the lamp. He strikes a loud chord; then as* SEELCHEN *moves towards that sound the lamp goes out; there is again only blue shadow; but the couples have disappeared into the Inn, and the doorway has grown dark.*

SEELCHEN. Ah! What I do not like, he will not let me see.

LAMOND. Will you not come, then, little soul?

SEELCHEN. Always to dance?

LAMOND. Not so!

THE SHUTTERS *of the houses are suddenly thrown wide. In a lighted room on one side of the Inn are seen two pale men and a woman, amongst many clicking machines. On the other side of the Inn, in a forge, are visible two women and a man, but half clothed, making chains.*

SEELCHEN. [*Recoiling from both sights, in turn*] How sad they look—all! What are they making?

In the dark doorway of the Inn a light shines out, and in it is seen a figure, visible only from the waist up, clad in gold-cloth studded with jewels, with a flushed complacent face, holding in one hand a glass of golden wine.

SEELCHEN. It is beautiful. What is it?

LAMOND. Luxury.

SEELCHEN. What is it standing on? I cannot see.

Unseen, THE WINE HORN'S *mandolin twangs out.*

LAMOND. For that do not look, little soul.

SEELCHEN. Can it not walk? [*He shakes his head*] Is that all they make here with their sadness?

But again the mandolin twangs out; the shutters fall over the houses; the door of the Inn grows dark.

LAMOND. What is it, then, you would have? Is it learning? There are books here, that, piled on each other, would reach to the stars! [*But* SEELCHEN *shakes her head*] There is religion so deep that no man knows what it means. [*But* SEELCHEN *shakes her head*] There is religion so shallow, you may have it by turning a handle. We have everything.

SEELCHEN. Is God here?

LAMOND. Who knows? Is God with your goats? [*But* SEELCHEN *shakes her head*] What then do you want?

SEELCHEN. Life.

The mandolin twangs out.

LAMOND. [*Pointing to his breast*] There is but one road to life—

SEELCHEN. Ah! but I do not love.

LAMOND. When a feather flies, is it not loving the wind—the unknown? When the day brings not new things, we are children of sorrow. If darkness and light did not change, could we breathe? Child! To

live is to love, to love is to live—seeking for wonder. [*And as she draws nearer*] See! To love is to peer over the edge, and, spying the little grey flower, to climb down! It has wings; it has flown—again you must climb; it shivers, 'tis but air in your hand—you must crawl, you must cling, you must leap, and still it is there and not there—for the grey flower flits like a moth, and the wind of its wings is all you shall catch. But your eyes shall be shining, your cheeks shall be burning, your breast shall be panting—Ah! little heart! [*The scene falls darker*] And when the night comes—there it is still, thistledown blown on the dark, and your white hands will reach for it, and your honey breath waft it, and never, never, shall you grasp that wanton thing—but life shall be lovely. [*His voice dies to a whisper. He stretches out his arms*]

SEELCHEN. [*Touching his breast*] I will come.

LAMOND. [*Drawing her to the dark doorway*] Love me!

SEELCHEN. I love!

The mandolin twangs out, the doorway for a moment is all glamorous; and they pass through. Illumined by the glimmer of the lamp the Youth of THE WINE HORN *is seen again. And slowly to the chords of his mandolin he begins to sing:*

"*The windy hours through darkness fly—*
Canst hear them, little heart?
New loves are born, and old loves die,
And kissing lips must part.

The dusky bees of passing years—
Canst see them, soul of mine—
From flower and flower supping tears,
And pale sweet honey wine?

[*His voice grows strange and passionate*]

O flame that treads the marsh of time,
Flitting for ever low,
Where, through the black enchanted slime,
We, desperate, following go—
Untimely fire, we bid thee stay!
Into dark air above,
The golden gipsy thins away—
So has it been with love!"

While he is singing, the moon grows pale, and dies. It falls dark, save for the glimmer of the lamp beneath which he stands. But as his song ends, the dawn breaks over the houses, the lamp goes out—THE WINE HORN *becomes shadow. Then from the doorway of the Inn, in the chill grey light* SEELCHEN *comes forth. She is pale, as if wan with living; her eyes like pitch against the powdery whiteness of her face.*

SEELCHEN. My heart is old.

But as she speaks, from far away is heard a faint chiming of COWBELLS; *and while she stands listening,* LAMOND *appears in the doorway of the Inn.*

LAMOND. Little soul!

SEELCHEN. You! Always you!

LAMOND. I have new wonders.

SEELCHEN. [*Mournfully*] No.

LAMOND. I swear it! You have not tired of me, that am never the same? It cannot be.

SEELCHEN. Listen!

The chime of THE COWBELLS *is heard again.*

LAMOND. [*Jealously*] The music of dull sleep! Has life, then, with me been sorrow?

SEELCHEN. I do not regret.

LAMOND. Come!

SEELCHEN. [*Pointing to her breast*] The bird is tired with flying. [*Touching her lips*] The flowers have no dew.

LAMOND. Would you leave me?

SEELCHEN. See!

There, in a streak of the dawn, against the plane tree is seen the Shepherd of THE COW HORN, *standing wrapped in his mountain cloak.*

LAMOND. What is it?

SEELCHEN. He!

LAMOND. There is nothing. [*He holds her fast*] I have shown you the marvels of my town—the gay, the bitter wonders. We have known life. If with you I may no longer live, then let us die! See! Here are sweet Deaths by Slumber and by Drowning!

The mandolin twangs out, and from the dim doorway of the Inn come forth the shadowy

forms, DEATH BY SLUMBER, *and* DEATH BY DROWNING, *who to a ghostly twanging of mandolins dance slowly towards* SEELCHEN, *stand smiling at her, and as slowly dance away.*

SEELCHEN. [*Following*] Yes. They are good and sweet.

While she moves towards the Inn, LAMOND'S *face becomes transfigured with joy. But just as she reaches the doorway, there is a distant chiming of bells and blowing of pipes, and the Shepherd of* THE COW HORN *sings:*

"*To the wild grass come, and the dull far roar*
Of the falling rock; to the flowery meads
Of thy mountain home, where the eagles soar,
And the grizzled flock in the sunshine feeds.
To the Alp, where I, in the pale light crowned
With the moon's thin horns, to my pasture roam;
To the silent sky, and the wistful sound
Of the rosy dawns—my daughter, come!"

While HE *sings, the sun has risen; and* SEELCHEN *has turned, with parted lips, and hands stretched out; and the forms of death have vanished.*

SEELCHEN. I come.

LAMOND. [*Clasping her knees*] Little soul! Must I then die, like a gnat when the sun goes down? Without *you* I am nothing.

SEELCHEN. [*Releasing herself*] Poor heart—I am gone!

LAMOND. It is dark. [*He covers his face with his cloak*].

Then as SEELCHEN *reaches the Shepherd of* THE COW HORN, *there is blown a long note of a pipe; the scene falls back; and there rises a far, continual, mingled sound of Cowbells, and Flower Bells, and Pipes.*

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SCENE IV

The scene slowly brightens with the misty flush of dawn. SEELCHEN *stands on a green alp, with all around, nothing but blue sky. A slip of a crescent moon is lying on her back. On a low rock sits a brown-faced* GOATHERD *blowing on a pipe, and the four Flower-children are dancing in their shifts of grey-white, and blue, rose-pink, and burnt-gold. Their bells are ringing, as they pelt each other with flowers of their own colours; and each in turn, wheeling, flings one flower at* SEELCHEN, *who puts them to her lips and eyes.*

SEELCHEN. The dew! [*She moves towards the rock*] Goatherd!

But THE FLOWERS *encircle him; and when they wheel away he has vanished. She turns to* THE FLOWERS, *but they too vanish. The veils of mist are rising.*

SEELCHEN. Gone! [*She rubs her eyes; then turning once more to the rock, sees* FELSMAN *standing there, with his arms folded*] Thou!

FELSMAN. So thou hast come—like a sick heifer to be healed. Was it good in the Town—that kept thee so long?

SEELCHEN. I do not regret.

FELSMAN. Why then return?

SEELCHEN. I was tired.

FELSMAN. Never again shalt thou go from me!

SEELCHEN. [*Mocking*] With what wilt thou keep me?

FELSMAN. [*Grasping her*] Thus.

SEELCHEN. I have known Change—I am no timid maid.

FELSMAN. [*Moodily*] Aye, thou art different. Thine eyes are hollow—thou art white-faced.

SEELCHEN. [*Still mocking*] Then what hast thou here that shall keep me?

FELSMAN. The sun.

SEELCHEN. To burn me.

FELSMAN. The air.

There is a faint wailing of wind.

SEELCHEN. To freeze me.

FELSMAN. The silence.

The noise of the wind dies away.

SEELCHEN. Yes, it is lonely.

FELSMAN. Wait! And the flowers shall dance to thee.

And to a ringing of their bells, THE FLOWERS *come dancing; till, one by one, they cease, and sink down, nodding, falling asleep.*

SEELCHEN. See! Even they grow sleepy here!

FELSMAN. I will call the goats to wake them.

THE GOATHERD *is seen again sitting upright on his rock and piping. And there come four little brown, wild-eyed, naked Boys, with*

Goat's legs and feet, who dance gravely in and out of The Sleeping Flowers; and THE FLOWERS *wake, spring up, and fly. Till each Goat, catching his flower has vanished, and* THE GOATHERD *has ceased to pipe, and lies motionless again on his rock.*

FELSMAN. Love me!

SEELCHEN. Thou art rude!

FELSMAN. Love me!

SEELCHEN. Thou art grim!

FELSMAN. Aye, I have no silver tongue. Listen! This is my voice. [*Sweeping his arm round all the still alp*] It is quiet. From dawn to the first star all is fast. [*Laying his hand on her heart*] And the wings of the bird shall be still.

SEELCHEN. [*Touching his eyes*] Thine eyes are fierce. In them I see the wild beasts crouching. In them I see the distance. Are they always fierce?

FELSMAN. Never—to look on thee, my flower.

SEELCHEN. [*Touching his hands*] Thy hands are rough to pluck flowers. [*She breaks away from him to the rock where* THE GOATHERD *is lying*] See! Nothing moves! The very day stands still. Boy! [*But* THE GOATHERD *neither stirs nor answers*] He is lost in the blue. [*Passionately*] Boy! He will not answer me. No one will answer me here.

FELSMAN. [*With fierce longing*] Am *I* then no one?

SEELCHEN. Thou?

[*The scene darkens with evening*]

See! Sleep has stolen the day! It is night already.

There come the female shadow forms of SLEEP, *in grey cobweb garments, waving their arms drowsily, wheeling round her.*

SEELCHEN. Are you Sleep? Dear Sleep!

Smiling, she holds out her arms to FELSMAN. *He takes her swaying form. They vanish, encircled by the forms of* SLEEP. *It is dark, save for the light of the thin horned moon suddenly grown bright. Then on his rock, to a faint piping* THE GOATHERD *sings:*

"My goat, my little speckled one,
My yellow-eyed, sweet-smelling,
Let moon and wind and golden sun
And stars beyond all telling
Make, every day, a sweeter grass,
And multiply thy leaping!
And may the mountain foxes pass
And never scent thee sleeping!
Oh! Let my pipe be clear and far,
And let me find sweet water!
No hawk, nor udder-seeking jar
Come near thee, little daughter!
May fiery rocks defend, at noon,
Thy tender feet from slipping!
Oh! hear my prayer beneath the moon—
Great Master, Goat-God—skipping!"

There passes in the thin moonlight the Goat-God Pan; and with a long wail of the pipe THE

GOATHERD BOY *is silent. Then the moon fades, and all is black; till, in the faint grisly light of the false dawn creeping up,* SEELCHEN *is seen rising from the side of the sleeping* FELSMAN. THE GOATHERD BOY *has gone; but by the rock stands the Shepherd of* THE COW HORN *in his cloak.*

SEELCHEN. Years, years I have slept. My spirit is hungry. [*Then as she sees the Shepherd of* THE COW HORN *standing there*] I know thee now—Life of the earth—the smell of thee, the sight of thee, the taste of thee, and all thy music. I have passed thee and gone by. [*She moves away*]

FELSMAN. [*Waking*] Where wouldst thou go?

SEELCHEN. To the edge of the world.

FELSMAN. [*Rising and trying to stay her*] Thou *shalt* not leave me!

[*But against her smiling gesture he struggles as though against solidity*]

SEELCHEN. Friend! The time is on me.

FELSMAN. Were my kisses, then, too rude? Was I too dull?

SEELCHEN. I do not regret.

The Youth of THE WINE HORN *is seen suddenly standing opposite the motionless Shepherd of* THE COW HORN; *and his mandolin twangs out.*

FELSMAN. The cursed music of the Town! Is it back to *him* thou wilt go? [*Groping for sight of the hated figure*] I cannot see.

SEELCHEN. Fear not! I go ever onward.

FELSMAN. Do not leave me to the wind in the rocks! Without thee love is dead, and I must die.

SEELCHEN. Poor heart! I am gone.

FELSMAN. [*Crouching against the rock*] It is cold.

At the blowing of the Shepherd's pipe, THE COW HORN *stretches forth his hand to her. The mandolin twangs out, and* THE WINE HORN *holds out his hand. She stands unmoving.*

SEELCHEN. Companions, I must go. In a moment it will be dawn.

In silence THE COW HORN *and* THE WINE HORN *cover their faces. The false dawn dies. It falls quite dark.*

SCENE V

Then a faint glow stealing up, lights the snowy head of THE GREAT HORN, *and streams forth on* SEELCHEN. *To either side of that path of light, like shadows,* THE COW HORN *and* THE WINE HORN *stand with cloaked heads.*

SEELCHEN. Great One! I come!

The Peak of THE GREAT HORN *speaks in a far-away voice, growing, with the light, clearer and stronger.*

Wandering flame, thou restless fever
Burning all things, regretting none;
The winds of fate are stilled for ever—
Thy little generous life is done,
And all its wistful wonderings cease!
Thou traveller to the tideless sea,
Where light and dark, and change and peace,
Are One—Come, little soul, to MYSTERY!

SEELCHEN, *falling on her knees, bows her head to the ground. The glow slowly fades till the scene is black.*

SCENE VI

Then as the blackness lifts, in the dim light of the false dawn filtering through the window of the mountain hut, LAMOND *and* FELSMAN *are seen standing beside* SEELCHEN *looking down at her asleep on the window seat.*

FELSMAN [*Putting out his hand to wake her*] In a moment it will be dawn.

She stirs, and her lips move, murmuring.

LAMOND. Let her sleep. She's dreaming.

FELSMAN *raises a lantern, till its light falls on her face. Then the two men move stealthily towards the door, and, as she speaks, pass out.*

SEELCHEN. [*Rising to her knees, and stretching out her hands with ecstasy*] Great One, I come! [*Waking, she looks around, and struggles to her feet*] My little dream!

Through the open door, the first flush of dawn shows in the sky. There is a sound of goat-bells passing.

The curtain falls.

JUSTICE

A TRAGEDY IN FOUR ACTS

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

JAMES HOW
WALTER HOW, *his son* } *solicitors*
ROBERT COKESON, *their managing clerk*
WILLIAM FALDER, *their junior clerk*
SWEEDLE, *their office-boy*
WISTER, *a detective*
COWLEY, *a cashier*
MR. JUSTICE FLOYD, *a judge*
HAROLD CLEAVER, *an old advocate*
HECTOR FROME, *a young advocate*
CAPTAIN DANSON, V.C., *a prison governor*
THE REV. HUGH MILLER, *a prison chaplain*
EDWARD CLEMENTS, *a prison doctor*
WOODER, *a chief warder*
MOANEY
CLIPTON } *convicts*
O'CLEARY
RUTH HONEYWILL, *a woman*
A NUMBER OF BARRISTERS, SOLICITORS, SPECTATORS, USHERS, REPORTERS, JURYMEN, WARDERS, AND PRISONERS

TIME: The Present.

ACT I. The office of James and Walter How. Morning. July.

ACT II. Assizes. Afternoon. October.

ACT III. A prison. December.

SCENE I. The Governor's office.

SCENE II. A corridor.

SCENE III. A cell.

ACT IV. The office of James and Walter How. Morning. March, two years later.

CAST OF THE FIRST PRODUCTION

AT THE

DUKE OF YORK'S THEATRE, FEBRUARY 21, 1910

James How	Mr. Sydney Valentine
Walter How	Mr. Charles Maude
Cokeson	Mr. Edmund Gwenn
Falder	Mr. Dennis Eadie
The Office-boy	Mr. George Hersee
The Detective	Mr. Leslie Carter
The Cashier	Mr. C. E. Vernon
The Judge	Mr. Dion Boucicault
The Old Advocate	Mr. Oscar Adye
The Young Advocate	Mr. Charles Bryant
The Prison Governor	Mr. Grendon Bentley
The Prison Chaplain	Mr. Hubert Harben
The Prison Doctor	Mr. Lewis Casson
Wooder	Mr. Frederick Lloyd
Moaney	Mr. Robert Pateman
Clipton	Mr. O. P. Heggie
O'Cleary	Mr. Whitford Kane
Ruth Honeywill	Miss Edyth Olive

ACT I

The scene is the managing clerk's room, at the offices of JAMES AND WALTER HOW, *on a July morning. The room is old-fashioned, furnished with well-worn mahogany and leather, and lined with tin boxes and estate plans. It has three doors. Two of them are close together in the centre of a wall. One of these two doors leads to the outer office, which is only divided from the managing clerk's room by a partition of wood and clear glass; and when the door into this outer office is opened there can be seen the wide outer door leading out on to the stone stairway of the building. The other of these two centre doors leads to the junior clerk's room. The third door is that leading to the partners' room.*

The managing clerk, COKESON, *is sitting at his table adding up figures in a pass-book, and murmuring their numbers to himself. He is a man of sixty, wearing spectacles; rather short, with a bald head, and an honest, pug-dog face. He is dressed in a well-worn black frock-coat and pepper-and-salt trousers.*

COKESON. And five's twelve, and three—fifteen, nineteen, twenty-three, thirty-two, forty-one—and carry

four. [*He ticks the page, and goes on murmuring*] Five, seven, twelve, seventeen, twenty-four and nine, thirty-three, thirteen and carry one.

He again makes a tick. The outer office door is opened, and SWEEDLE, *the office-boy, appears, closing the door behind him. He is a pale youth of sixteen, with spiky hair.*

COKESON. [*With grumpy expectation*] And carry one.

SWEEDLE. There's a party wants to see Falder, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. Five, nine, sixteen, twenty-one, twenty-nine—and carry two. Sent him to Morris's. What name?

SWEEDLE. Honeywill.

COKESON. What's his business?

SWEEDLE. It's a woman.

COKESON. A lady?

SWEEDLE. No, a person.

COKESON. Ask her in. Take this pass-book to Mr. James. [*He closes the pass-book.*

SWEEDLE. [*Reopening the door*] Will you come in, please?

RUTH HONEYWILL *comes in. She is a tall woman, twenty-six years old, unpretentiously dressed, with black hair and eyes, and an ivory-white, clear-cut face. She stands very still, having a natural dignity of pose and gesture.*

SWEEDLE *goes out into the partners' room with the pass-book.*

COKESON. [*Looking round at* RUTH] The young man's out. [*Suspiciously*] State your business, please.

RUTH. [*Who speaks in a matter-of-fact voice, and with a slight West-Country accent*] It's a personal matter, sir.

COKESON. We don't allow private callers here. Will you leave a message?

RUTH. I'd rather see him, please.

She narrows her dark eyes and gives him a honeyed look.

COKESON. [*Expanding*] It's all against the rules. Suppose I had *my* friends here to see me! It'd never do!

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [*A little taken aback*] Exactly! And here you are wanting to see a *junior* clerk!

RUTH. Yes, sir; I must see him.

COKESON. [*Turning full round to her with a sort of outraged interest*] But this is a lawyer's office. Go to his private address.

RUTH. He's not there.

COKESON. [*Uneasy*] Are you related to the party?

RUTH. No, sir.

COKESON. [*In real embarrassment*] I don't know what to say. It's no affair of the office.

RUTH. But what am I to do?

COKESON. Dear me! I can't tell you that.

SWEEDLE *comes back. He crosses to the outer office and passes through into it, with a quizzical look at* COKESON, *carefully leaving the door an inch or two open.*

COKESON. [*Fortified by this look*] This won't do, you know, this won't do at all. Suppose one of the partners came in!

An incoherent knocking and chuckling is heard from the outer door of the outer office.

SWEEDLE. [*Putting his head in*] There's some children outside here.

RUTH. They're mine, please.

SWEEDLE. Shall I hold them in check?

RUTH. They're quite small, sir. [*She takes a step towards* COKESON.

COKESON. You mustn't take up his time in office hours; we're a clerk short as it is.

RUTH. It's a matter of life and death.

COKESON. [*Again outraged*] Life and death!

SWEEDLE. Here *is* Falder.

FALDER *has entered through the outer office. He is a pale, good-looking young man, with quick, rather scared eyes. He moves towards the door of the clerks' office, and stands there irresolute.*

COKESON. Well, I'll give you a minute. It's not regular.

Taking up a bundle of papers, he goes out into the partners' room.

RUTH. [*In a low, hurried voice*] He's on the drink again, Will. He tried to cut my throat last night. I came out with the children before he was awake. I went round to you——

FALDER. I've changed my digs.

RUTH. Is it all ready for to-night?

FALDER. I've got the tickets. Meet me 11.45 at the booking office. For God's sake don't forget we're man and wife! [*Looking at her with tragic intensity*] Ruth!

RUTH. You're not afraid of going, are you?

FALDER. Have you got your things, and the children's?

RUTH. Had to leave them, for fear of waking Honeywill, all but one bag. I can't go near home again.

FALDER. [*Wincing*] All that money gone for nothing. How much *must* you have?

RUTH. Six pounds—I could do with that, I think.

FALDER. Don't give away where we're going. [*As if to himself*] When I get out there I mean to forget it all.

RUTH. If you're sorry, say so. I'd sooner he killed me than take you against your will.

FALDER. [*With a queer smile*] We've *got* to go. I don't care; I'll have *you*.

RUTH. You've just to say; it's not too late.

FALDER. It *is* too late. Here's seven pounds. Booking office—11.45 to-night. If you weren't what you are to me, Ruth——!

RUTH. Kiss me!

They cling together passionately, then fly apart just as COKESON *re-enters the room.* RUTH *turns and goes out through the outer office.* COKESON *advances deliberately to his chair and seats himself.*

COKESON. This isn't right, Falder.

FALDER. It shan't occur again, sir.

COKESON. It's an improper use of these premises.

FALDER. Yes, sir.

COKESON. You quite understand—the party was in some distress; and, having children with her, I allowed my feelings—— [*He opens a drawer and produces from it a tract*] Just take this! "Purity in the Home." It's a well-written thing.

FALDER. [*Taking it, with a peculiar expression*] Thank you, sir.

COKESON. And look here, Falder, before Mr. Walter comes, have you finished up that cataloguing Davis had in hand before he left?

FALDER. I shall have done with it to-morrow, sir—for good.

COKESON. It's over a week since Davis went. Now it won't do, Falder. You're neglecting your work for private life. I shan't mention about the party having called, but——

FALDER. [*Passing into his room*] Thank you, sir.

COKESON *stares at the door through which* FALDER *has gone out; then shakes his head, and is just settling down to write, when*

WALTER HOW *comes in through the outer office. He is a rather refined-looking man of thirty-five, with a pleasant, almost apologetic voice.*

WALTER. Good-morning, Cokeson.

COKESON. Morning, Mr. Walter.

WALTER. My father here?

COKESON. [*Always with a certain patronage as to a young man who might be doing better*] Mr. James has been here since eleven o'clock.

WALTER. I've been in to see the pictures, at the Guildhall.

COKESON. [*Looking at him as though this were exactly what was to be expected*] Have you now—ye-es. This lease of Boulter's—am I to send it to counsel?

WALTER. What does my father say?

COKESON. 'Aven't bothered him.

WALTER. Well, we can't be too careful.

COKESON. It's such a little thing—hardly worth the fees. I thought you'd do it yourself.

WALTER. Send it, please. I don't want the responsibility.

COKESON. [*With an indescribable air of compassion*] Just as you like. This "right-of-way" case—we've got 'em on the deeds.

WALTER. I know; but the intention was obviously to exclude that bit of common ground.

COKESON. We needn't worry about that. We're the *right* side of the law.

WALTER. I don't like it.

COKESON. [*With an indulgent smile*] We shan't want to set ourselves up against the law. Your father wouldn't waste his time doing that.

As he speaks JAMES HOW *comes in from the partners' room. He is a shortish man, with white side-whiskers, plentiful grey hair, shrewd eyes, and gold pince-nez.*

JAMES. Morning, Walter.

WALTER. How are you, father?

COKESON. [*Looking down his nose at the papers in his hand as though deprecating their size*] I'll just take Boulter's lease in to young Falder to draft the instructions. [*He goes out into* FALDER'S *room.*

WALTER. About that right-of-way case?

JAMES. Oh, well, we must go forward there. I thought you told me yesterday the firm's balance was over four hundred.

WALTER. So it is.

JAMES. [*Holding out the pass-book to his son*] Three—five—one, no recent cheques. Just get me out the cheque-book.

WALTER *goes to a cupboard, unlocks a drawer, and produces a cheque-book.*

JAMES. Tick the pounds in the counterfoils. Five, fifty-four, seven, five, twenty-eight, twenty, ninety, eleven, fifty-two, seventy-one. Tally?

WALTER. [*Nodding*] Can't understand. Made sure it was over four hundred.

JAMES. Give me the cheque-book. [*He takes the*

cheque-book and cons the counterfoils] What's this ninety?

WALTER. Who drew it?

JAMES. You.

WALTER. [*Taking the cheque-book*] July 7th? That's the day I went down to look over the Trenton Estate —last Friday week; I came back on the Tuesday, you remember. But look here, father, it was *nine* I drew a cheque for. Five guineas to Smithers and my expenses. It just covered all but half a crown.

JAMES. [*Gravely*] Let's look at that ninety cheque. [*He sorts the cheque out from the bundle in the pocket of the pass-book*] Seems all right. There's no nine here. This is bad. Who cashed that nine-pound cheque?

WALTER. [*Puzzled and pained*] Let's see! I was finishing Mrs. Reddy's will—only just had time; yes —I gave it to Cokeson.

JAMES. Look at that t y: that yours?

WALTER. [*After consideration*] My *y's* curl back a little; this doesn't.

JAMES. [*As* COKESON *re-enters from* FALDER'S *room*] We must ask him. Just come here and carry your mind back a bit, Cokeson. D'you remember cashing a cheque for Mr. Walter last Friday week—the day he went to Trenton?

COKESON. Ye-es. Nine pounds.

JAMES. Look at this. [*Handing him the cheque.*

COKESON. No! Nine pounds. My lunch was just coming in; and of course I *like* it hot; I gave the cheque to Davis to run round to the bank. He brought it

back, all gold—you remember, Mr. Walter, you wanted some silver to pay your cab. [*With a certain contemptuous compassion*] Here, let *me* see. You've got the wrong cheque.

He takes cheque-book and pass-book from WALTER.

WALTER. Afraid not.

COKESON. [*Having seen for himself*] It's funny.

JAMES. You gave it to Davis, and Davis sailed for Australia on Monday. Looks black, Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Puzzled and upset*] Why this'd be a felony! No, no! there's some mistake.

JAMES. I hope so.

COKESON. There's never been anything of that sort in the office the twenty-nine years I've been here.

JAMES. [*Looking at cheque and counterfoil*] This is a very clever bit of work; a warning to you not to leave space after your figures, Walter.

WALTER. [*Vexed*] Yes, I know—I was in such a tearing hurry that afternoon.

COKESON. [*Suddenly*] This has upset me.

JAMES. The counterfoil altered too—very deliberate piece of swindling. What was Davis's ship?

WALTER. *City of Rangoon.*

JAMES. We ought to wire and have him arrested at Naples; he can't be there yet.

COKESON. His poor young wife. I liked the young man. Dear, oh dear! In this office!

WALTER. Shall I go to the bank and ask the cashier?

JAMES. [*Grimly*] Bring him round here. And ring up Scotland Yard.

WALTER. Really?

He goes out through the outer office. JAMES *paces the room. He stops and looks at* COKESON, *who is disconsolately rubbing the knees of his trousers.*

JAMES. Well, Cokeson! There's something in character, isn't there?

COKESON. [*Looking at him over his spectacles*] I don't quite take you, sir.

JAMES. Your story would sound d——d thin to any one who didn't know you.

COKESON. Ye-es! [*He laughs. Then with sudden gravity*] I'm sorry for that young man. I feel it as if it was my own son, Mr. James.

JAMES. A nasty business!

COKESON. It unsettles you. All goes on regular, and then a thing like this happens. Shan't relish my lunch to-day.

JAMES. As bad as that, Cokeson?

COKESON. It makes you think. [*Confidentially*] He must have had temptation.

JAMES. Not so fast. We haven't convicted him yet.

COKESON. I'd sooner have lost a month's salary than had this happen. [*He broods.*

JAMES. I hope that fellow will hurry up.

COKESON. [*Keeping things pleasant for the cashier*] It isn't fifty yards, Mr. James He won't be a minute.

JAMES. The idea of dishonesty about this office—it hits me hard, Cokeson.

He goes towards the door of the partners' room.

SWEEDLE. [*Entering quietly, to* COKESON *in a low voice*] She's popped up again, sir—something she forgot to say to Falder.

COKESON. [*Roused from his abstraction*] Eh? Impossible. Send her away!

JAMES. What's that?

COKESON. Nothing, Mr. James. A private matter. Here, I'll come myself. [*He goes into the outer office as* JAMES *passes into the partners' room*] Now, you really mustn't—we can't have anybody just now.

RUTH. Not for a minute, sir?

COKESON. Reely! Reely! I can't have it. If you want him, wait about; he'll be going out for his lunch directly.

RUTH. Yes, sir.

WALTER, *entering with the cashier, passes* RUTH *as she leaves the outer office.*

COKESON. [*To the cashier, who resembles a sedentary dragoon*] Good-morning. [To WALTER] Your father's in there.

WALTER *crosses and goes into the partners' room.*

COKESON. It's a nahsty, unpleasant little matter, Mr. Cowley. I'm quite ashamed to have to trouble you

COWLEY. I remember the cheque quite well. [*As if it were a liver*] Seemed in perfect order.

COKESON. Sit down, won't you? I'm not a sensitive man, but a thing like this about the place—it's not nice. I like people to be open and jolly together.

COWLEY. Quite so.

COKESON. [*Buttonholing him, and glancing towards the partners' room*] Of course he's a young man. I've told him about it before now—leaving space after his figures, but he *will* do it.

COWLEY. I should remember the person's face—quite a youth.

COKESON. I don't think we shall be able to show him to you, as a matter of fact.

JAMES and WALTER have come back from the partners' room.

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley. You've seen my son and myself, you've seen Mr. Cokeson, and you've seen Sweedle, my office-boy. It was none of us, I take it.

The cashier shakes his head with a smile.

JAMES. Be so good as to sit there. Cokeson, engage Mr. Cowley in conversation, will you?

He goes towards FALDER'S *room.*

COKESON. Just a word, Mr. James.

JAMES. Well?

COKESON. You don't want to upset the young man in there, do you? He's a nervous young feller.

JAMES. This must be thoroughly cleared up, Cokeson, for the sake of Falder's name, to say nothing of yours.

COKESON. [*With some dignity*] That'll look after

itself, sir. He's been upset once this morning; I don't want him startled again.

JAMES. It's a matter of form; but I can't stand upon niceness over a thing like this—too serious. Just talk to Mr. Cowley.

He opens the door of FALDER'S *room.*

JAMES. Bring in the papers in Boulter's lease, will you, Falder?

COKESON. [*Bursting into voice*] Do you keep dogs?

The cashier, with his eyes fixed on the door, does not answer.

COKESON. You haven't such a thing as a bulldog pup you could spare me, I suppose?

At the look on the cashier's face his jaw drops, and he turns to see FALDER *standing in the doorway, with his eyes fixed on* COWLEY, *like the eyes of a rabbit fastened on a snake.*

FALDER. [*Advancing with the papers*] Here they are, sir!

JAMES. [*Taking them*] Thank you.

FALDER. Do you want me, sir?

JAMES. No, thanks!

FALDER *turns and goes back into his own room. As he shuts the door* JAMES *gives the cashier an interrogative look, and the cashier nods.*

JAMES. Sure? This isn't as we suspected.

COWLEY. Quite. He knew me. I suppose he can't slip out of that room?

COKESON. [*Gloomily*] There's only the window—a whole floor and a basement.

The door of FALDER'S *room is quietly opened, and* FALDER, *with his hat in his hand, moves towards the door of the outer office.*

JAMES. [*Quietly*] Where are you going, Falder?

FALDER. To have my lunch, sir.

JAMES. Wait a few minutes, would you? I want to speak to you about this lease.

FALDER. Yes, sir. [*He goes back into his room.*

COWLEY. If I'm wanted, I can swear that's the young man who cashed the cheque. It was the last cheque I handled that morning before my lunch. These are the numbers of the notes he had. [*He puts a slip of paper on the table; then, brushing his hat round*] Good-morning!

JAMES. Good-morning, Mr. Cowley!

COWLEY. [*To* COKESON] Good-morning.

COKESON. [*With stupefaction*] Good-morning.

The cashier goes out through the outer office. COKESON *sits down in his chair, as though it were the only place left in the morass of his feelings.*

WALTER. What are you going to do?

JAMES. Have him in. Give me the cheque and the counterfoil.

COKESON. I don't understand. I thought young Davis——

JAMES. We shall see.

WALTER. One moment, father: have you thought it out?

JAMES. Call him in!

COKESON. [*Rising with difficulty and opening* FALDER's *door; hoarsely*] Step in here a minute.

FALDER *comes in.*

FALDER. [*Impassively*] Yes, sir?

JAMES. [*Turning to him suddenly with the cheque held out*] You know this cheque, Falder?

FALDER. No, sir.

JAMES. Look at it. You cashed it last Friday week.

FALDER. Oh! yes, sir; that one—Davis gave it me.

JAMES. I know. And you gave Davis the cash?

FALDER. Yes, sir.

JAMES. When Davis gave you the cheque was it exactly like this?

FALDER. Yes, I think so, sir.

JAMES. You know that Mr. Walter drew that cheque for *nine* pounds?

FALDER. No, sir—ninety.

JAMES. Nine, Falder.

FALDER. [*Faintly*] I don't understand, sir.

JAMES. The suggestion, of course, is that the cheque was altered; whether by you or Davis is the question.

FALDER. I—I——

COKESON. Take your time, take your time.

FALDER. [*Regaining his impassivity*] Not by me, sir.

JAMES. The cheque was handed to Cokeson by Mr. Walter at one o'clock; we know that because Mr. Cokeson's lunch had just arrived.

COKESON. I couldn't leave it.

JAMES. Exactly; he therefore gave the cheque to Davis. It was cashed by you at 1.15. We know that because the cashier recollects it for the last cheque he handled before *his* lunch.

FALDER. Yes, sir, Davis gave it to me because some friends were giving him a farewell luncheon.

JAMES. [*Puzzled*] You accuse Davis, then?

FALDER. I don't know, sir—it's very funny.

WALTER, *who has come close to his father, says something to him in a low voice.*

JAMES. Davis was not here again after that Saturday, was he?

COKESON. [*Anxious to be of assistance to the young man, and seeing faint signs of their all being jolly once more*] No, he sailed on the Monday.

JAMES. Was he, Falder?

FALDER. [*Very faintly*] No, sir.

JAMES. Very well, then, how do you account for the fact that this nought was added to the nine in the counterfoil on or after *Tuesday?*

COKESON. [*Surprised*] How's that?

FALDER *gives a sort of lurch; he tries to pull himself together, but he has gone all to pieces.*

JAMES. [*Very grimly*] Out, I'm afraid, Cokeson. The cheque-book remained in Mr. Walter's pocket till he came back from Trenton on Tuesday morning. In the face of this, Falder, do you still deny that you altered both cheque and counterfoil?

FALDER. No, sir—no, Mr. How. I did it, sir; I did it.

COKESON. [*Succumbing to his feelings*] Dear, dear! what a thing to do!

FALDER. I wanted the money so badly, sir. I didn't know what I was doing.

COKESON. However such a thing could have come into your head!

FALDER. [*Grasping at the words*] I can't think, sir, really! It was just a minute of madness.

JAMES. A long minute, Falder. [*Tapping the counterfoil*] Four days at least.

FALDER. Sir, I swear I didn't know what I'd done till afterwards, and then I hadn't the pluck. Oh! sir, look over it! I'll pay the money back—I will, I promise.

JAMES. Go into your room.

FALDER, *with a swift imploring look, goes back into his room. There is silence.*

JAMES. About as bad a case as there could be.

COKESON. To break the law like that—in here!

WALTER. What's to be done?

JAMES. Nothing for it. Prosecute.

WALTER. It's his first offence.

JAMES. [*Shaking his head*] I've grave doubts of that. Too neat a piece of swindling altogether.

COKESON. I shouldn't be surprised if he was tempted.

JAMES. Life's one long temptation, Cokeson.

COKESON. Ye-es, but I'm speaking of the flesh

and the devil, Mr. James. There was a woman come to see him this morning.

WALTER. The woman we passed as we came in just now. Is it his wife?

COKESON. No, no relation. [*Restraining what in jollier circumstances would have been a wink*] A married person, though.

WALTER. How do you know?

COKESON. Brought her children. [*Scandalised*] There they were outside the office.

JAMES. A real bad egg.

WALTER. I should like to give him a chance.

JAMES. I can't forgive him for the sneaky way he went to work—counting on our suspecting young Davis if the matter came to light. It was the merest accident the cheque-book stayed in your pocket.

WALTER. It *must* have been the temptation of a moment. He hadn't time.

JAMES. A man doesn't succumb like that in a moment, if he's a clean mind and habits. He's rotten; got the eyes of a man who can't keep his hands off when there's money about.

WALTER. [*Dryly*] We hadn't noticed that before.

JAMES. [*Brushing the remark aside*] I've seen lots of those fellows in my time. No doing anything with them except to keep 'em out of harm's way. They've got a blind spot.

WALTER. It's penal servitude.

COKESON. They're *nahsty* places—prisons.

JAMES. [*Hesitating*] I don't see how it's possible

to spare him. Out of the question to keep him in this office—honesty's the *sine qua non.*

COKESON. [*Hypnotised*] Of course it *is.*

JAMES. Equally out of the question to send him out amongst people who've no knowledge of his character. One must think of society.

WALTER. But to brand him like this?

JAMES. If it had been a straightforward case I'd give him another chance. It's far from that. He has dissolute habits.

COKESON. I didn't say that—extenuating circumstances.

JAMES. Same thing. He's gone to work in the most cold-blooded way to defraud his employers, and cast the blame on an innocent man. If that's not a case for the law to take its course, I don't know what is.

WALTER. For the sake of his future, though.

JAMES. [*Sarcastically*] According to you, no one would ever prosecute.

WALTER. [*Nettled*] I hate the idea of it.

COKESON. That's *rather ex parte*, Mr. Walter! We must have protection.

JAMES. This is degenerating into talk.

He moves towards the partners' room.

WALTER. Put yourself in his place, father.

JAMES. You ask too much of me.

WALTER. We can't possibly tell the pressure there was on him.

JAMES. You may depend on it, my boy, if a man is

going to do this sort of thing he'll do it, pressure or no pressure; if he isn't nothing'll make him.

WALTER. He'll never do it again.

COKESON. [*Fatuously*] S'pose I were to have a talk with him. We don't want to be hard on the young man.

JAMES. That'll do, Cokeson. I've made up my mind. [*He passes into the partners' room.*

COKESON. [*After a doubtful moment*] We must excuse your father. I don't want to go against your father; if he thinks it right.

WALTER. Confound it, Cokeson! why don't you back me up? You know you feel——

COKESON. [*On his dignity*] I really can't say what I feel.

WALTER. We shall regret it.

COKESON. He must have known what he was doing.

WALTER. [*Bitterly*] "The quality of mercy is not strained."

COKESON. [*Looking at him askance*] Come, come, Mr. Walter. We must try and see it sensible.

SWEEDLE. [*Entering with a tray*] Your lunch, sir.

COKESON. Put it down!

While SWEEDLE *is putting it down on* COKESON'S *table, the detective,* WISTER, *enters the outer office, and, finding no one there, comes to the inner doorway. He is a square, medium-sized man, clean-shaved, in a serviceable blue serge suit and strong boots.*

WISTER. [*To* WALTER] From Scotland Yard, sir. Detective-Sergeant Wister.

WALTER. [*Askance*] Very well! I'll speak to my father.

He goes into the partners' room. JAMES *enters.*

JAMES. Morning! [*In answer to an appealing gesture from* COKESON] I'm sorry; I'd stop short of this if I felt I could. Open that door. [SWEEDLE, *wondering and scared, opens it*] Come here, Mr. Falder.

As FALDER *comes shrinkingly out, the detective in obedience to a sign from* JAMES, *slips his hand out and grasps his arm.*

FALDER. [*Recoiling*] Oh! no,—oh! no!

WISTER. Come, come, there's a good lad.

JAMES. I charge him with felony.

FALDER. Oh, sir! There's some one—I did it for her. Let me be till to-morrow.

JAMES *motions with his hand. At that sign of hardness,* FALDER *becomes rigid. Then, turning, he goes out quietly in the detective's grip.* JAMES *follows, stiff and erect.* SWEEDLE, *rushing to the door with open mouth, pursues them through the outer office into the corridor. When they have all disappeared* COKESON *spins completely round and makes a rush for the outer office.*

COKESON. [*Hoarsely*] Here! Here! What are we doing?

There is silence. He takes out his handkerchief and mops the sweat from his face. Going back blindly to his table, sits down, and stares blankly at his lunch.

The curtain falls.

ACT II

A Court of Justice, on a foggy October afternoon—crowded with barristers, solicitors, reporters, ushers, and jurymen. Sitting in the large, solid dock is FALDER, *with a warder on either side of him, placed there for his safe custody, but seemingly indifferent to and unconscious of his presence.* FALDER *is sitting exactly opposite to the* JUDGE, *who, raised above the clamour of the court, also seems unconscious of and indifferent to everything.* HAROLD CLEAVER, *the counsel for the Crown, is a dried, yellowish man, of more than middle age, in a wig worn almost to the colour of his face.* HECTOR FROME, *the counsel for the defence, is a young, tall man, clean-shaved, in a very white wig. Among the spectators, having already given their evidence, are* JAMES *and* WALTER HOW, *and* COWLEY, *the cashier.* WISTER, *the detective, is just leaving the witness-box.*

CLEAVER. That is the case for the Crown, me lud!

Gathering his robes together, he sits down.

FROME. [*Rising and bowing to the* JUDGE] If it please your lordship and gentlemen of the jury. I am not going to dispute the fact that the prisoner altered

this cheque, but I am going to put before you evidence as to the condition of his mind, and to submit that you would not be justified in finding that he was responsible for his actions at the time. I am going to show you, in fact, that he did this in a moment of aberration, amounting to temporary insanity, caused by the violent distress under which he was labouring Gentlemen, the prisoner is only twenty-three years old I shall call before you a woman from whom you will learn the events that led up to this act. You will hear from her own lips the tragic circumstances of her life, the still more tragic infatuation with which she has inspired the prisoner. This woman, gentlemen, has been leading a miserable existence with a husband who habitually ill-uses her, from whom she actually goes in terror of her life. I am not, of course, saying that it's either right or desirable for a young man to fall in love with a married woman, or that it's his business to rescue her from an ogre-like husband. I'm not saying anything of the sort. But we all know the power of the passion of love; and I would ask you to remember, gentlemen, in listening to her evidence, that, married to a drunken and violent husband, she has no power to get rid of him; for, as you know, another offence besides violence is necessary to enable a woman to obtain a divorce; and of this offence it does not appear that her husband is guilty.

JUDGE. Is this relevant, Mr. Frome?

FROME. My lord, I submit, extremely—I shall be able to show your lordship that directly.

JUDGE. Very well.

FROME. In these circumstances, what alternatives were left to her? She could either go on living with this drunkard, in terror of her life; or she could apply to the Court for a separation order. Well, gentlemen, my experience of such cases assures me that this would have given her very insufficient protection from the violence of such a man; and even if effectual would very likely have reduced her either to the workhouse or the streets—for it's not easy, as she is now finding, for an unskilled woman without means of livelihood to support herself and her children without resorting either to the Poor Law or—to speak quite plainly—to the sale of her body.

JUDGE. You are ranging rather far, Mr. Frome.

FROME. I shall fire point-blank in a minute, my lord.

JUDGE. Let us hope so.

FROME. Now, gentlemen, mark—and this is what I have been leading up to—this woman will tell you, and the prisoner will confirm her, that, confronted with such alternatives, she set her whole hopes on himself, knowing the feeling with which she had inspired him. She saw a way out of her misery by going with him to a new country, where they would both be unknown, and might pass as husband and wife. This was a desperate and, as my friend Mr. Cleaver will no doubt call it, an immoral resolution; but, as a fact, the minds of both of them were constantly turned towards it. One wrong is no excuse

for another, and those who are never likely to be faced by such a situation possibly have the right to hold up their hands—as to that I prefer to say nothing. But whatever view you take, gentlemen, of this part of the prisoner's story—whatever opinion you form of the right of these two young people under such circumstances to take the law into their own hands—the fact remains that this young woman in her distress, and this young man, little more than a boy, who was so devotedly attached to her, *did* conceive this—if you like—reprehensible design of going away together. Now, for that, of course, they required money, and—they had none. As to the actual events of the morning of July 7th, on which this cheque was altered, the events on which I rely to prove the defendant's irresponsibility—I shall allow those events to speak for themselves, through the lips of my witnesses. Robert Cokeson. [*He turns, looks round, takes up a sheet of paper, and waits.*]

COKESON *is summoned into court, and goes into the witness-box, holding his hat before him. The oath is administered to him.*

FROME. What is your name?

COKESON. Robert Cokeson.

FROME. Are you managing clerk to the firm of solicitors who employ the prisoner?

COKESON. Ye-es.

FROME. How long had the prisoner been in their employ?

COKESON. Two years. No, I'm wrong there—all but seventeen days.

FROME. Had you him under your eye all that time?

COKESON. Except Sundays and holidays.

FROME. Quite so. Let us hear, please, what you have to say about his general character during those two years.

COKESON. [*Confidentially to the jury, and as if a little surprised at being asked*] He was a nice, pleasant-spoken young man. I'd no fault to find with him—quite the contrary. It was a *great* surprise to me when he did a thing like that.

FROME. Did he ever give you reason to suspect his honesty?

COKESON. No! To have dishonesty in our office, that'd never do.

FROME. I'm sure the jury fully appreciate that, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. Every man of business knows that honesty's the sign qua non.

FROME. Do you give him a good character all round, or do you not?

COKESON. [*Turning to the* JUDGE] Certainly. We were all very jolly and pleasant together, until this happened. Quite upset me.

FROME. Now, coming to the morning of the 7th of July, the morning on which the cheque was altered. What have you to say about his demeanour that morning?

COKESON. [*To the jury*] If you ask me, I don't think he was quite compos when he did it.

THE JUDGE. [*Sharply*] Are you suggesting that he was insane?

COKESON. Not compos.

THE JUDGE. A little more precision, please.

FROME. [*Smoothly*] Just tell us, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Somewhat outraged*] Well, in my opinion —[*looking at the* JUDGE]—such as it is—he was jumpy at the time. The jury will understand my meaning.

FROME. Will you tell us how you came to that conclusion?

COKESON. Ye-es, I will. I have my lunch in from the restaurant, a chop and a potato—saves time. That day it happened to come just as Mr. Walter How handed me the cheque. Well, I like it hot; so I went into the clerks' office and I handed the cheque to Davis, the other clerk, and told him to get change. I noticed young Falder walking up and down. I said to him: "This is not the Zoological Gardens, Falder."

FROME. Do you remember what he answered?

COKESON. Ye-es: "I wish to God it were!" Struck me as funny.

FROME. Did you notice anything else peculiar?

COKESON. I did.

FROME. What was that?

COKESON. His collar was unbuttoned. Now, I like a young man to be neat. I said to him: "Your collar's unbuttoned."

FROME. And what did he answer?

COKESON. Stared at me. It wasn't nice.

THE JUDGE. Stared at you? Isn't that a very common practice?

COKESON. Ye-es, but it was the look in his eyes. I can't explain my meaning—it was funny.

FROME. Had you ever seen such a look in his eyes before?

COKESON. No. If I had I should have spoken to the partners. We can't have anything eccentric in our profession.

THE JUDGE. Did you speak to them on that occasion?

COKESON. [*Confidentially*] Well, I didn't like to trouble them about prime facey evidence.

FROME. But it made a very distinct impression on your mind?

COKESON. Ye-es. The clerk Davis could have told you the same.

FROME. Quite so. It's very unfortunate that we've not got him here. Now can you tell me of the morning on which the discovery of the forgery was made? That would be the 18th. Did anything happen that morning?

COKESON. [*With his hand to his ear*] I'm a little deaf.

FROME. Was there anything in the course of that morning—I mean before the discovery—that caught your attention?

COKESON. Ye-es—a woman.

THE JUDGE. How is *this* relevant, Mr. Frome?

FROME. I am trying to establish the state of mind in which the prisoner committed this act, my lord.

THE JUDGE. I quite appreciate that. But this was long after the act.

FROME. Yes, my lord, but it contributes to my contention.

THE JUDGE. Well!

FROME. You say a woman. Do you mean that she came to the office?

COKESON. Ye-es.

FROME. What for?

COKESON. Asked to see young Falder; he was out at the moment.

FROME. Did you see her?

COKESON. I did.

FROME. Did she come alone?

COKESON. [*Confidentially*] Well, there you put me in a difficulty. I mustn't tell you what the office-boy told me.

FROME. Quite so, Mr. Cokeson, quite so——

COKESON. [*Breaking in with an air of "You are young—leave it to me"*] But I think we can get round it. In answer to a question put to her by a third party the woman said to me: "They're mine, sir."

THE JUDGE. What are? What were?

COKESON. Her children. They were outside.

THE JUDGE. How do you know?

COKESON. Your lordship mustn't ask me that, or I

shall have to tell you what I was told—and that'd never do.

THE JUDGE. [*Smiling*] The office-boy made a statement.

COKESON. Egg-zactly.

FROME. What I want to ask you, Mr. Cokeson, is this. In the course of her appeal to see Falder, did the woman say anything that you specially remember?

COKESON. [*Looking at him as if to encourage him to complete the sentence*] A leetle more, sir.

FROME. Or did she not?

COKESON. She did. I shouldn't like you to have led me to the answer.

FROME. [*With an irritated smile*] Will you tell the jury what it was?

COKESON. "It's a matter of life and death."

FOREMAN OF THE JURY. Do you mean the woman said that?

COKESON. [*Nodding*] It's not the sort of thing you like to have said to you.

FROME. [*A little impatiently*] Did Falder come in while she was there? [COKESON *nods*] And she saw him, and went away?

COKESON. Ah! there I can't follow you. I didn't see her go.

FROME. Well, is she there now?

COKESON. [*With an indulgent smile*] No!

FROME. Thank you, Mr. Cokeson. [*He sits down.*

CLEAVER. [*Rising*] You say that on the morning of

the forgery the prisoner was jumpy. Well, now, sir, what precisely do you mean by that word?

COKESON. [*Indulgently*] I *want* you to understand. Have you ever seen a dog that's lost its master? He was kind of everywhere at once with his eyes.

CLEAVER. Thank you; I was coming to his eyes. You called them "funny." What are we to understand by that? Strange, or what?

COKESON. Ye-es, funny.

CLEAVER. [*Sharply*] Yes, sir, but what may be funny to you may not be funny to me, or to the jury. Did they look frightened, or shy, or fierce, or what?

COKESON. You make it very hard for me. I give you the word, and you want me to give you another.

CLEAVER. [*Rapping his desk*] Does "funny" mean mad?

COKESON. Not mad, fun——

CLEAVER. Very well! Now you say he had his collar unbuttoned? Was it a hot day?

COKESON. Ye-es; I think it was.

CLEAVER. And did he button it when you called his attention to it?

COKESON. Ye-es, I think he did.

CLEAVER. Would you say that that denoted insanity?

He sits down. COKESON, *who has opened his mouth to reply, is left gaping.*

FROME. [*Rising hastily*] Have you ever caught him in that dishevelled state before?

COKESON. No! He was *always* clean and quiet.

FROME. That will do, thank you.

COKESON *turns blandly to the* JUDGE, *as though to rebuke counsel for not remembering that the* JUDGE *might wish to have a chance; arriving at the conclusion that he is to be asked nothing further, he turns and descends from the box, and sits down next to* JAMES *and* WALTER.

FROME. Ruth Honeywill.

RUTH *comes into court, and takes her stand stoically in the witness-box. She is sworn.*

FROME. What is your name, please?

RUTH. Ruth Honeywill.

FROME. How old are you?

RUTH. Twenty-six.

FROME. You are a married woman, living with your husband? A little louder.

RUTH. No, sir; not since July.

FROME. Have you any children?

RUTH. Yes, sir, two.

FROME. Are they living with you?

RUTH. Yes, sir.

FROME. You know the prisoner?

RUTH. [*Looking at him*] Yes.

FROME. What was the nature of your relations with him?

RUTH. We were friends.

THE JUDGE. Friends?

RUTH. [*Simply*] Lovers, sir.

THE JUDGE. [*Sharply*] In what sense do you use that word?

RUTH. We love each other.

THE JUDGE. Yes, but——

RUTH. [*Shaking her head*] No, your lordship—not yet.

THE JUDGE. Not yet! H'm! [*He looks from* RUTH *to* FALDER] Well!

FROME. What is your husband?

RUTH. Traveller.

FROME. And what was the nature of your married life?

RUTH. [*Shaking her head*] It don't bear talking about.

FROME. Did he ill-treat you, or what?

RUTH. Ever since my first was born.

FROME. In what way?

RUTH. I'd rather not say. All sorts of ways.

THE JUDGE. I am afraid I must stop this, you know.

RUTH. [*Pointing to* FALDER] *He* offered to take me out of it, sir. We were going to South America.

FROME. [*Hastily*] Yes, quite—and what prevented you?

RUTH. I was outside his office when he was taken away. It nearly broke my heart.

FROME. You knew, then, that he had been arrested?

RUTH. Yes, sir. I called at his office afterwards, and [*pointing to* COKESON] that gentleman told me all about it.

FROME. Now, do you remember the morning of Friday, July 7th?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. Why?

RUTH. My husband nearly strangled me that morning.

THE JUDGE. Nearly strangled you!

RUTH. [*Bowing her head*] Yes, my lord.

FROME. With his hands, or——?

RUTH. Yes, I just managed to get away from him. I went straight to my friend. It was eight o'clock.

THE JUDGE. In the morning? Your husband was not under the influence of liquor then?

RUTH. It wasn't always that.

FROME. In what condition were you?

RUTH. In very bad condition, sir. My dress was torn, and I was half choking.

FROME. Did you tell your friend what had happened?

RUTH. Yes. I wish I never had.

FROME. It upset him?

RUTH. Dreadfully.

FROME. Did he ever speak to you about a cheque?

RUTH. Never.

FROME. Did he ever give you any money?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. When was that?

RUTH. On Saturday.

FROME. The 8th?

RUTH. To buy an outfit for me and the children and get all ready to start.

FROME. Did that surprise you, or not?

RUTH. What, sir?

FROME. That he had money to give you.

RUTH. Yes, because on the morning when my husband nearly killed me my friend cried because he hadn't the money to get me away. He told me afterwards he'd come into a windfall.

FROME. And when did you last see him?

RUTH. The day he was taken away, sir. It was the day we were to have started.

FROME. Oh, yes, the morning of the arrest. Well, did you see him at all between the Friday and that morning? [RUTH *nods*] What was his manner then?

RUTH. Dumb-like—sometimes he didn't seem able to say a word.

FROME. As if something unusual had happened to him?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. Painful, or pleasant, or what?

RUTH. Like a fate hanging over him.

FROME. [*Hesitating*] Tell me, did you love the prisoner very much?

RUTH. [*Bowing her head*] Yes.

FROME. And had he a very great affection for you?

RUTH. [*Looking at* FALDER] Yes, sir.

FROME. Now, ma'am, do you or do you not think that your danger and unhappiness would seriously affect his balance, his control over his actions?

RUTH. Yes.

FROME. His reason, even?

RUTH. For a moment like, I think it would.

FROME. Was he very much upset that Friday morning, or was he fairly calm?

RUTH. Dreadfully upset. I could hardly bear to let him go from me.

FROME. Do you still love him?

RUTH. [*With her eyes on* FALDER] He's ruined himself for me.

FROME. Thank you.

He sits down. RUTH *remains stoically upright in the witness-box.*

CLEAVER. [*In a considerate voice*] When you left him on the morning of Friday the 7th you would not say that he was out of his mind, I suppose?

RUTH. No, sir.

CLEAVER. Thank you; I've no further questions to ask you.

RUTH. [*Bending a little forward to the jury*] I would have done the same for him; I would indeed.

THE JUDGE. Please, please! You say your married life is an unhappy one? Faults on both sides?

RUTH. Only that I never bowed down to him. I don't see why I should, sir, not to a man like that.

THE JUDGE. You refused to obey him?

RUTH. [*Avoiding the question*] I've always studied him to keep things nice.

THE JUDGE. Until you met the prisoner—was that it?

RUTH. No; even after that.

THE JUDGE. I ask, you know, because you seem to me to glory in this affection of yours for the prisoner.

RUTH. [*Hesitating*] I—I do. It's the only thing in my life now.

THE JUDGE. [*Staring at her hard*] Well, step down, please.

RUTH *looks at* FALDER, *then passes quietly down and takes her seat among the witnesses.*

FROME. I call the prisoner, my lord.

FALDER *leaves the dock; goes into the witness-box, and is duly sworn.*

FROME. What is your name?

FALDER. William Falder.

FROME. And age?

FALDER. Twenty-three.

FROME. You are not married?

FALDER *shakes his head.*

FROME. How long have you known the last witness?

FALDER. Six months.

FROME. Is her account of the relationship between you a correct one?

FALDER. Yes.

FROME. You became devotedly attached to her, however?

FALDER. Yes.

THE JUDGE. Though you knew she was a married woman?

FALDER. I couldn't help it, your lordship.

THE JUDGE. Couldn't help it?

FALDER. I didn't seem able to.

The JUDGE *slightly shrugs his shoulders.*

FROME. How did you come to know her?

FALDER. Through my married sister.

FROME. Did you know whether she was happy with her husband?

FALDER. It was trouble all the time.

FROME. You knew her husband?

FALDER. Only through her—he's a brute.

THE JUDGE. I can't allow indiscriminate abuse of a person not present.

FROME. [*Bowing*] If your lordship pleases. [*To* FALDER] You admit altering this cheque?

FALDER *bows his head.*

FROME. Carry your mind, please, to the morning of Friday, July the 7th, and tell the jury what happened.

FALDER. [*Turning to the jury*] I was having my breakfast when she came. Her dress was all torn, and she was gasping and couldn't seem to get her breath at all; there were the marks of his fingers round her throat; her arm was bruised, and the blood had got into her eyes dreadfully. It frightened me, and then when she told me, I felt—I felt—well—it was too much for me! [*Hardening suddenly*] If you'd seen it, having the feelings for her that I had, you'd have felt the same, I know.

FROME. Yes?

FALDER. When she left me—because I had to go to the office—I was out of my senses for fear that he'd do it again, and thinking what I could do. I

couldn't work—all the morning I was like that—simply couldn't fix my mind on anything. I couldn't think at all. I seemed to have to keep moving. When Davis—the other clerk—gave me the cheque—he said: "It'll do you good, Will, to have a run with this. You seem half off your chump this morning." Then when I had it in my hand—I don't know how it came, but it just flashed across me that if I put the t y and the nought there would be the money to get her away. It just came and went—I never thought of it again. Then Davis went out to his luncheon, and I don't really remember what I did till I'd pushed the cheque through to the cashier under the rail. I remember his saying "Gold or notes?" Then I suppose I knew what I'd done. Anyway, when I got outside I wanted to chuck myself under a 'bus; I wanted to throw the money away; but it seemed I was in for it, so I thought at any rate I'd save her. Of course the tickets I took for the passage and the little I gave her's been wasted, and all, except what I was obliged to spend myself, I've restored. I keep thinking over and over however it was I came to do it, and how I can't have it all again to do differently!

FALDER *is silent, twisting his hands before him.*

FROME. How far is it from your office to the bank?

FALDER. Not more than fifty yards, sir.

FROME. From the time Davis went out to lunch to the time you cashed the cheque, how long do you say it must have been?

FALDER. It couldn't have been four minutes, sir, because I ran all the way.

FROME. During those four minutes you say you remember nothing?

FALDER. No, sir; only that I ran.

FROME. Not even adding the t y and the nought?

FALDER. No, sir. I don't really.

FROME *sits down, and* CLEAVER *rises.*

CLEAVER. But you remember running, do you?

FALDER. I was all out of breath when I got to the bank.

CLEAVER. And you don't remember altering the cheque?

FALDER. [*Faintly*] No, sir.

CLEAVER. Divested of the romantic glamour which my friend is casting over the case, is this anything but an ordinary forgery? Come.

FALDER. I was half frantic all that morning, sir.

CLEAVER. Now, now! You don't deny that the t y and the nought were so like the rest of the handwriting as to thoroughly deceive the cashier?

FALDER. It was an accident.

CLEAVER. [*Cheerfully*] Queer sort of accident, wasn't it? On which day did you alter the counterfoil?

FALDER. [*Hanging his head*] On the Wednesday morning.

CLEAVER. Was that an accident too?

FALDER. [*Faintly*] No.

CLEAVER. To do that you had to watch your opportunity, I suppose?

FALDER. [*Almost inaudibly*] Yes.

CLEAVER. You don't suggest that you were suffering under great excitement when you did that?

FALDER. I was haunted.

CLEAVER. With the fear of being found out?

FALDER. [*Very low*] Yes.

THE JUDGE. Didn't it occur to you that the only thing for you to do was to confess to your employers, and restore the money?

FALDER. I was afraid. [*There is silence.*

CLEAVER. You desired, too, no doubt, to complete your design of taking this woman away?

FALDER. When I found I'd done a thing like that, to do it for nothing seemed so dreadful. I might just as well have chucked myself into the river.

CLEAVER. You knew that the clerk Davis was about to leave England—didn't it occur to you when you altered this cheque that suspicion would fall on him?

FALDER. It was all done in a moment. I thought of it afterwards.

CLEAVER. And that didn't lead you to avow what you'd done?

FALDER. [*Sullenly*] I meant to write when I got out there—I would have repaid the money.

THE JUDGE. But in the meantime your innocent fellow clerk might have been prosecuted.

FALDER. I knew he was a long way off, your lordship. I thought there'd be time. I didn't think they'd find it out so soon.

FROME. I might remind your lordship that as Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book in his pocket till after Davis had sailed, if the discovery had been made only one day later Falder himself would have left, and suspicion would have attached to him, and not to Davis, from the beginning.

THE JUDGE. The question is whether the prisoner knew that suspicion would light on himself, and not on Davis. [*To* FALDER *sharply*] Did you know that Mr. Walter How had the cheque-book till after Davis had sailed?

FALDER. I—I—thought—he——

THE JUDGE. Now speak the truth—yes or no!

FALDER. [*Very low*] No, my lord. I had no means of knowing.

THE JUDGE. That disposes of your point, Mr. Frome.

[FROME *bows to the* JUDGE.

CLEAVER. Has any aberration of this nature ever attacked you before?

FALDER. [*Faintly*] No, sir.

CLEAVER. You had recovered sufficiently to go back to your work that afternoon?

FALDER. Yes, I had to take the money back.

CLEAVER. You mean the *nine* pounds. Your wits were sufficiently keen for you to remember that? And you still persist in saying you don't remember altering this cheque. [*He sits down.*

FALDER. If I hadn't been mad I should never have had the courage.

FROME. [*Rising*] Did you have your lunch before going back?

FALDER. I never ate a thing all day; and at night I couldn't sleep.

FROME. Now, as to the four minutes that elapsed between Davis's going out and your cashing the cheque: do you say that you recollect *nothing* during those four minutes?

FALDER. [*After a moment*] I remember thinking of Mr. Cokeson's face.

FROME. Of Mr. Cokeson's face! Had that any connection with what you were doing?

FALDER. No, sir.

FROME. Was that in the office, before you ran out?

FALDER. Yes, and while I was running.

FROME. And that lasted till the cashier said: "Will you have gold or notes?"

FALDER. Yes, and then I seemed to come to myself —and it was too late.

FROME. Thank you. That closes the evidence for the defence, my lord.

The JUDGE *nods, and* FALDER *goes back to his seat in the dock.*

FROME. [*Gathering up notes*] If it please your lordship —Gentlemen of the Jury,—My friend in cross-examination has shown a disposition to sneer at the defence which has been set up in this case, and I am free to admit that nothing I can say will move you, if the evidence has not already convinced you that the prisoner

committed this act in a moment when to all practical intents and purposes he was not responsible for his actions; a moment of such mental and moral vacuity, arising from the violent emotional agitation under which he had been suffering, as to amount to temporary madness. My friend has alluded to the "romantic glamour" with which I have sought to invest this case. Gentlemen, I have done nothing of the kind. I have merely shown you the background of "life"—that palpitating life which, believe me—whatever my friend may say—always lies behind the commission of a crime. Now gentlemen, we live in a highly civilized age, and the sight of brutal violence disturbs us in a very strange way, even when we have no personal interest in the matter. But when we see it inflicted on a woman whom we love—what then? Just think of what your own feelings would have been, each of you, at the prisoner's age; and then look at him. Well! he is hardly the comfortable, shall we say bucolic, person likely to contemplate with equanimity marks of gross violence on a woman to whom he was devotedly attached. Yes, gentlemen, look at him! He has not a strong face; but neither has he a vicious face. He is just the sort of man who would easily become the prey of his emotions. You have heard the description of his eyes. My friend may laugh at the word "funny"—*I* think it better describes the peculiar uncanny look of those who are strained to breaking-point than any other word which could have been used. I don't pretend, mind you, that his mental irresponsibility was more

than a flash of darkness, in which all sense of proportion became lost; but I do contend, that, just as a man who destroys himself at such a moment may be, and often is, absolved from the stigma attaching to the crime of self-murder, so he may, and frequently does, commit other crimes while in this irresponsible condition, and that he may as justly be acquitted of criminal intent and treated as a patient. I admit that this is a plea which might well be abused. It is a matter for discretion. But here you have a case in which there is every reason to give the benefit of the doubt. You heard me ask the prisoner what he thought of during those four fatal minutes. What was his answer? "I thought of Mr. Cokeson's face!" Gentlemen, no man could invent an answer like that; it is absolutely stamped with truth. You have seen the great affection (legitimate or not) existing between him and this woman, who came here to give evidence for him at the risk of her life. It is impossible for you to doubt his distress on the morning when he committed this act. We well know what terrible havoc such distress can make in weak and highly nervous people. It was all the work of a moment. The rest has followed, as death follows a stab to the heart, or water drops if you hold up a jug to empty it. Believe me, gentlemen, there is nothing more tragic in life than the utter impossibility of changing what you have done. Once this cheque was altered and presented, the work of four minutes—four mad minutes—the rest has been silence. But in those four minutes the boy before you has slipped through a

door, hardly opened, into that great cage which never again quite lets a man go—the cage of the Law. His further acts, his failure to confess, the alteration of the counterfoil, his preparations for flight, are all evidence —not of deliberate and guilty intention when he committed the prime act from which these subsequent acts arose; no—they are merely evidence of the weak character which is clearly enough his misfortune. But is a man to be lost because he is bred and born with a weak character? Gentlemen, men like the prisoner are destroyed daily under our law for want of that human insight which sees them as they are, patients, and not criminals. If the prisoner be found guilty, and treated as though he were a criminal type, he will, as all experience shows, in all probability become one. I beg you not to return a verdict that may thrust him back into prison and brand him for ever. Gentlemen, Justice is a machine that, when some one has once given it the starting push, rolls on of itself. Is this young man to be ground to pieces under this machine for an act which at the worst was one of weakness? Is he to become a member of the luckless crews that man those dark, ill-starred ships called prisons? Is that to be his voyage—from which so few return? Or is he to have another chance, to be still looked on as one who has gone a little astray, but who will come back? I urge you, gentlemen, do not ruin this young man! For, as a result of those four minutes, ruin, utter and irretrievable, stares him in the face. He can be saved now. Imprison him as a criminal, and I affirm to you

that he will be lost. He has neither the face nor the manner of one who can survive that terrible ordeal. Weigh in the scales his criminality and the suffering he has undergone. The latter is ten times heavier already. He has lain in prison under this charge for more than two months. Is he likely ever to forget that? Imagine the anguish of his mind during that time. He has had his punishment, gentlemen, you may depend. The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice over this boy began when it was decided to prosecute him. We are now already at the second stage. If you permit it to go on to the third I would not give—that for him.

He holds up finger and thumb in the form of a circle, drops his hand, and sits down.

The jury stir, and consult each other's faces; then they turn towards the counsel for the Crown, who rises, and, fixing his eyes on a spot that seems to give him satisfaction, slides them every now and then towards the jury.

CLEAVER. May it please your lordship—[*Rising on his toes*] Gentlemen of the Jury,—The facts in this case are not disputed, and the defence, if my friend will allow me to say so, is so thin that I don't propose to waste the time of the Court by taking you over the evidence. The plea is one of temporary insanity. Well, gentlemen, I daresay it is clearer to me than it is to you why this rather—what shall we call it?—bizarre defence has been set up. The alternative would have been to plead guilty. Now, gentlemen, if the

prisoner had pleaded guilty my friend would have had to rely on a simple appeal to his lordship. Instead of that, he has gone into the byways and hedges and found this—er—peculiar plea, which has enabled him to show you the proverbial woman, to put her in the box—to give, in fact, a romantic glow to this affair. I compliment my friend; I think it highly ingenious of him. By these means, he has—to a certain extent—got round the Law. He has brought the whole story of motive and stress out in court, at first hand, in a way that he would not otherwise have been able to do. But when you have once grasped that fact, gentlemen, you have grasped everything. [*With good-humoured contempt*] For look at this plea of insanity; we can't put it lower than that. You have heard the woman. She has every reason to favour the prisoner, but what did she say? She said that the prisoner was *not* insane when she left him in the morning. If he were going out of his mind through distress, that was obviously the moment when insanity would have shown itself. You have heard the managing clerk, another witness for the defence. With some difficulty I elicited from him the admission that the prisoner, though jumpy (a word that he seemed to think you would understand, gentlemen, and I'm sure I hope you do), was *not* mad when the cheque was handed to Davis. I agree with my friend that it's unfortunate that we have not got Davis here, but the prisoner has told you the words with which Davis in turn handed him the cheque; he obviously, therefore, was *not* mad when he received it,

or he would not have remembered those words. The cashier has told you that he was certainly in his senses when he cashed it. We have therefore the plea that a man who is sane at ten minutes past one, and sane at fifteen minutes past, may, for the purposes of avoiding the consequences of a crime, call himself insane between those points of time. Really, gentlemen, this is so peculiar a proposition that I am not disposed to weary you with further argument. You will form your own opinion of its value. My friend has adopted this way of saying a great deal to you—and very eloquently—on the score of youth, temptation, and the like. I might point out, however, that the offence with which the prisoner is charged is one of the most serious known to our law; and there are certain features in this case, such as the suspicion which he allowed to rest on his innocent fellow-clerk, and his relations with this married woman, which will render it difficult for you to attach too much importance to such pleading. I ask you, in short, gentlemen, for that verdict of guilty which, in the circumstances, I regard you as, unfortunately, bound to record.

Letting his eyes travel from the JUDGE *and the jury to* FROME, *he sits down.*

THE JUDGE. [*Bending a little towards the jury, and speaking in a business-like voice*] Gentlemen, you have heard the evidence, and the comments on it. My only business is to make clear to you the issues you have to try. The facts are admitted, so far as the alteration of this cheque and counterfoil by the pris-

oner. The defence set up is that he was not in a responsible condition when he committed the crime. Well, you have heard the prisoner's story, and the evidence of the other witnesses—so far as it bears on the point of insanity. If you think that what you have heard establishes the fact that the prisoner was insane at the time of the forgery, you will find him guilty, but insane. If, on the other hand, you conclude from what you have seen and heard that the prisoner was sane—and nothing short of insanity will count—you will find him guilty. In reviewing the testimony as to his mental condition you must bear in mind very carefully the evidence as to his demeanour and conduct both before and after the act of forgery—the evidence of the prisoner himself, of the woman, of the witness—er—Cokeson, and—er—of the cashier. And in regard to that I especially direct your attention to the prisoner's admission that the idea of adding the t y and the nought did come into his mind at the moment when the cheque was handed to him; and also to the alteration of the counterfoil, and to his subsequent conduct generally. The bearing of all this on the question of premeditation (and premeditation will imply sanity) is very obvious. You must not allow any considerations of age or temptation to weigh with you in the finding of your verdict. Before you can come to a verdict of guilty but insane you must be well and thoroughly convinced that the condition of his mind was such as would have qualified him at the moment for a lunatic asylum. [*He pauses; then, seeing that the jury are doubtful whether to retire*

or no, adds:] You may retire, gentlemen, if you wish to do so.

The jury retire by a door behind the JUDGE. *The* JUDGE *bends over his notes.* FALDER, *leaning from the dock, speaks excitedly to his solicitor, pointing down at* RUTH. *The solicitor in turn speaks to* FROME.

FROME. [*Rising*] My lord. The prisoner is very anxious that I should ask you if your lordship would kindly request the reporters not to disclose the name of the woman witness in the Press reports of these proceedings. Your lordship will understand that the consequences might be extremely serious to her.

THE JUDGE. [*Pointedly—with the suspicion of a smile*] Well, Mr. Frome, you deliberately took this course which involved bringing her here.

FROME. [*With an ironic bow*] If your lordship thinks I could have brought out the full facts in any other way?

THE JUDGE. H'm! Well.

FROME. There is very real danger to her, your lordship.

THE JUDGE. You see, I have to take your word for all that.

FROME. If your lordship would be so kind. I can assure your lordship that I am not exaggerating.

THE JUDGE. It goes very much against the grain with me that the name of a witness should ever be suppressed. [*With a glance at* FALDER, *who is gripping and clasping his hands before him, and then at* RUTH,

who is sitting perfectly rigid with her eyes fixed on FALDER] I'll consider your application. It must depend. I have to remember that she may have come here to commit perjury on the prisoner's behalf.

FROME. Your lordship, I really——

THE JUDGE. Yes, yes—I don't suggest anything of the sort, Mr. Frome. Leave it at that for the moment.

As he finishes speaking, the jury return, and file back into the box.

CLERK OF ASSIZE. Gentlemen, are you agreed on your verdict?

FOREMAN. We are.

CLERK OF ASSIZE. Is it Guilty, or Guilty but insane?

FOREMAN. Guilty.

The JUDGE *nods; then, gathering up his notes, sits looking at* FALDER, *who stands motionless.*

FROME. [*Rising*] If your lordship would allow me to address you in mitigation of sentence. I don't know if your lordship thinks I can add anything to what I have said to the jury on the score of the prisoner's youth, and the great stress under which he acted.

THE JUDGE. I don't think you can, Mr. Frome.

FROME. If your lordship says so—I do most earnestly beg your lordship to give the utmost weight to my plea.

[*He sits down.*

THE JUDGE. [*To the* CLERK] Call upon him.

THE CLERK. Prisoner at the bar, you stand convicted of felony. Have you anything to say for yourself,

why the Court should not give you judgment according to law? [FALDER *shakes his head.*

THE JUDGE. William Falder, you have been given fair trial and found guilty, in my opinion rightly found guilty, of forgery. [*He pauses; then, consulting his notes, goes on*] The defence was set up that you were not responsible for your actions at the moment of committing this crime. There is no doubt, I think, that this was a device to bring out at first hand the nature of the temptation to which you succumbed. For throughout the trial your counsel was in reality making an appeal for mercy. The setting up of this defence of course enabled him to put in some evidence that might weigh in that direction. Whether he was well advised to do so is another matter. He claimed that you should be treated rather as a patient than as a criminal. And this plea of his, which in the end amounted to a passionate appeal, he based in effect on an indictment of the march of Justice, which he practically accused of confirming and completing the process of criminality. Now, in considering how far I should allow weight to his appeal, I have a number of factors to take into account. I have to consider on the one hand the grave nature of your offence, the deliberate way in which you subsequently altered the counterfoil, the danger you caused to an innocent man—and that, to my mind, is a very grave point—and finally I have to consider the necessity of deterring others from following your example. On the other hand, I have to bear in mind that you are young, that you have hitherto

borne a good character, that you were, if I am to believe your evidence and that of your witnesses, in a state of some emotional excitement when you committed this crime. I have every wish, consistently with my duty—not only to you, but to the community—to treat you with leniency. And this brings me to what are the determining factors in my mind in my consideration of your case. You are a clerk in a lawyer's office—that is a very serious element in this case; there can be no possible excuse made for you on the ground that you were not fully conversant with the nature of the crime you were committing, and the penalties that attach to it. It is said, however, that you were carried away by your emotions. The story has been told here to-day of your relations with this—er—Mrs. Honeywill; on that story both the defence and the plea for mercy were in effect based. Now what is that story? It is that you, a young man, and she, a young woman, unhappily married, had formed an attachment, which you both say—with what truth I am unable to gauge—had not yet resulted in immoral relations, but which you both admit was about to result in such relationship. Your counsel has made an attempt to palliate this, on the ground that the woman is in what he describes, I think, as "a hopeless position." As to that I can express no opinion. She is a married woman, and the fact is patent that you committed this crime with the view of furthering an immoral design. Now, however I might wish, I am not able to justify to my conscience a plea for mercy which has a basis inimical to

morality. It is vitiated *ab initio*, and would, if successful, free you for the completion of this immoral project. Your counsel has made an attempt to trace your offence back to what he seems to suggest is a defect in the marriage law; he has made an attempt also to show that to punish you with further imprisonment would be unjust. I do not follow him in these flights. *The Law is what it is*—a majestic edifice, sheltering all of us, each stone of which rests on another. I am concerned only with its administration. The crime you have committed is a very serious one. I cannot feel it in accordance with my duty to Society to exercise the powers I have in your favour. You will go to penal servitude for three years.

FALDER, *who throughout the* JUDGE'S *speech has looked at him steadily, lets his head fall forward on his breast.* RUTH *starts up from her seat as he is taken out by the warders. There is a bustle in court.*

THE JUDGE. [*Speaking to the reporters*] Gentlemen of the Press, I think that the name of the female witness should not be reported.

The reporters bow their acquiescence.

THE JUDGE. [*To* RUTH, *who is staring in the direction in which* FALDER *has disappeared*] Do you understand, your name will not be mentioned?

COKESON. [*Pulling her sleeve*] The judge is speaking to you.

RUTH *turns, stares at the* JUDGE, *and turns away.*

THE JUDGE. I shall sit rather late to-day. Call the next case.

CLERK OF ASSIZE. [*To a warder*] Put up John Booley.

To cries of "Witnesses in the case of Booley":

The curtain falls.

ACT III

SCENE I

A prison. A plainly furnished room, with two large barred windows, overlooking the prisoners' exercise yard, where men, in yellow clothes marked with arrows, and yellow brimless caps, are seen in single file at a distance of four yards from each other, walking rapidly on serpentine white lines marked on the concrete floor of the yard. Two warders in blue uniforms, with peaked caps and swords, are stationed amongst them. The room has distempered walls, a bookcase with numerous official-looking books, a cupboard between the windows, a plan of the prison on the wall, a writing-table covered with documents. It is Christmas Eve.

The GOVERNOR, *a neat, grave-looking man, with a trim, fair moustache, the eyes of a theorist, and grizzled hair, receding from the temples, is standing close to this writing-table looking at a sort of rough saw made out of a piece of metal. The hand in which he holds it is gloved, for two fingers are missing. The chief warder,* WOODER, *a tall, thin, military-*

looking man of sixty, with grey moustache and melancholy, monkey-like eyes, stands very upright two paces from him.

THE GOVERNOR. [*With a faint, abstracted smile*] Queer-looking affair, Mr. Wooder! Where did you find it?

WOODER. In his mattress, sir. Haven't come across such a thing for two years now.

THE GOVERNOR. [*With curiosity*] Had he any set plan?

WOODER. He'd sawed his window-bar about that much. [*He holds up his thumb and finger a quarter of an inch apart*]

THE GOVERNOR. I'll see him this afternoon. What's his name? Moaney! An old hand, I think?

WOODER. Yes, sir—fourth spell of penal. You'd think an old lag like him would have had more sense by now. [*With pitying contempt*] Occupied his mind, he said. Breaking in and breaking out—that's all they think about.

THE GOVERNOR. Who's next him?

WOODER. O'Cleary, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. The Irishman.

WOODER. Next him again there's that young fellow, Falder—star class—and next him old Clipton.

THE GOVERNOR. Ah, yes! "The philosopher." I want to see him about his eyes.

WOODER. Curious thing, sir: they seem to know when there's one of these tries at escape going on.

It makes them restive—there's a regular wave going through them just now.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Meditatively*] Odd things—those waves. [*Turning to look at the prisoners exercising*] Seem quiet enough out here!

WOODER. That Irishman, O'Cleary, began banging on his door this morning. Little thing like that's quite enough to upset the whole lot. They're just like dumb animals at times.

THE GOVERNOR. I've seen it with horses before thunder—it'll run right through cavalry lines.

The prison CHAPLAIN *has entered. He is a dark-haired, ascetic man, in clerical undress, with a peculiarly steady, tight-lipped face and slow, cultured speech.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*Holding up the saw*] Seen this, Miller?

THE CHAPLAIN. Useful-looking specimen.

THE GOVERNOR. Do for the Museum, eh! [*He goes to the cupboard and opens it, displaying to view a number of quaint ropes, hooks, and metal tools with labels tied on them*] That'll do, thanks, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER. [*Saluting*] Thank you, sir. [*He goes out.*

THE GOVERNOR. Account for the state of the men last day or two, Miller? Seems going through the whole place.

THE CHAPLAIN. No. I don't know of anything.

THE GOVERNOR. By the way, will you dine with us on Christmas Day?

THE CHAPLAIN. To-morrow. Thanks very much.

THE GOVERNOR. Worries me to feel the men discontented. [*Gazing at the saw*] Have to punish this poor devil. Can't help liking a man who tries to escape. [*He places the saw in his pocket and locks the cupboard again*]

THE CHAPLAIN. Extraordinary perverted will-power —some of them. Nothing to be done till it's broken.

THE GOVERNOR. And not much afterwards, I'm afraid. Ground too hard for golf?

WOODER *comes in again.*

WOODER. Visitor who's been seeing Q 3007 asks to speak to you, sir. I told him it wasn't usual.

THE GOVERNOR. What about?

WOODER. Shall I put him off, sir?

THE GOVERNOR. [*Resignedly*] No, no. Let's see him. Don't go, Miller.

WOODER *motions to some one without, and as the visitor comes in withdraws.*

The visitor is COKESON, *who is attired in a thick overcoat to the knees, woollen gloves, and carries a top hat.*

COKESON. I'm sorry to trouble you. I've been talking to the young man.

THE GOVERNOR. We have a good many here.

COKESON. Name of Falder, forgery. [*Producing a card, and handing it to the* GOVERNOR] Firm of James and Walter How. Well known in the law.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Receiving the card—with a faint smile*] What do you want to see me about, sir?

COKESON. [*Suddenly seeing the prisoners at exercise*] Why! what a sight!

THE GOVERNOR. Yes, we have that privilege from here; my office is being done up. [*Sitting down at his table*] Now, please!

COKESON. [*Dragging his eyes with difficulty from the window*] I *wanted* to say a word to you; I shan't keep you long. [*Confidentially*] Fact is, I oughtn't to be here by rights. His sister came to me—he's got no father and mother—and she was in some distress. "My husband won't let me go and see him," she said; "says he's disgraced the family. And his other sister," she said, "is an invalid." And she asked me to come. Well, I take an interest in him. He was our junior—I go to the same chapel—and I didn't like to refuse. And what I wanted to tell you was, he seems lonely here.

THE GOVERNOR. Not unnaturally.

COKESON. I'm afraid it'll prey on my mind. I see a lot of them about working together.

THE GOVERNOR. Those are local prisoners. The convicts serve their three months here in separate confinement, sir.

COKESON. But we don't want to be unreasonable. He's quite downhearted. I wanted to ask you to let him run about with the others.

THE GOVERNOR. [*With faint amusement*] Ring the bell—would you, Miller? [*To* COKESON] You'd like to hear what the doctor says about him, perhaps.

THE CHAPLAIN. [*Ringing the bell*] You are not accustomed to prisons, it would seem, sir.

COKESON. No. But it's a pitiful sight. He's quite a young fellow. I said to him: "Before a month's up," I said, "you'll be out and about with the others; it'll be a nice change for you." "A month!" he said —like that! "Come!" I said, "we mustn't exaggerate. What's a month? Why, it's nothing!" "A day," he said, "shut up in your cell thinking and brooding as I do, it's longer than a year outside. I can't help it," he said; "I try—but I'm built that way, Mr. Cokeson." And he held his hand up to his face. I could see the tears trickling through his fingers. It wasn't nice.

THE CHAPLAIN. He's a young man with large, rather peculiar eyes, isn't he? Not Church of England, I think?

COKESON. No.

THE CHAPLAIN. I know.

THE GOVERNOR. [*To* WOODER, *who has come in*] Ask the doctor to be good enough to come here for a minute. [WOODER *salutes, and goes out*] Let's see, he's not married?

COKESON. No. [*Confidentially*] But there's a party he's very much attached to, not altogether com-il-fo. It's a sad story.

THE CHAPLAIN. If it wasn't for drink and women, sir, this prison might be closed.

COKESON. [*Looking at the* CHAPLAIN *over his spectacles*] Ye-es, but I wanted to tell you about that, special. He had hopes they'd have let her come

and see him, but they haven't. Of course he asked me questions. I did my best, but I couldn't tell the poor young fellow a lie, with him in here—seemed like hitting him. But I'm afraid it's made him worse.

THE GOVERNOR. What was this news then?

COKESON. Like this. The woman had a nahsty, spiteful feller for a husband, and she'd left him. Fact is, she was going away with our young friend. It's not nice—but I've looked over it. Well, when he was put in here she said she'd earn her living apart, and wait for him to come out. That was a great consolation to him. But after a month she came to me—I *don't* know her personally—and she said: "I can't earn the children's living, let alone my own—I've got no friends. I'm obliged to keep out of everybody's way, else my husband'd get to know where I was. I'm very much reduced," she said. And she has lost flesh. "I'll have to go in the workhouse!" It's a painful story. I said to her: "No," I said, "not that! I've got a wife an' family, but sooner than you should do that I'll spare you a little myself." "Really," she said—she's a nice creature—"I don't like to take it from you. I think I'd better go back to my husband." Well, I know he's a nahsty, spiteful feller—drinks—but I didn't like to persuade her not to.

THE CHAPLAIN. Surely, no.

COKESON. Ye-es, but I'm sorry now; it's upset the poor young fellow dreadfully. And what I wanted to say was: He's got his three years to serve. I *want* things to be pleasant for him.

THE CHAPLAIN. [*With a touch of impatience*] The Law hardly shares your view, I'm afraid.

COKESON. But I can't help thinking that to shut him up there by himself'll turn him silly. And nobody wants that, I s'pose. I *don't* like to see a man cry.

THE CHAPLAIN. It's a very rare thing for them to give way like that.

COKESON. [*Looking at him—in a tone of sudden dogged hostility*] I keep dogs.

THE CHAPLAIN. Indeed?

COKESON. Ye-es. And I say this: I wouldn't shut one of them up all by himself, month after month, not if he'd bit me all over.

THE CHAPLAIN. Unfortunately, the criminal is not a dog; he has a sense of right and wrong.

COKESON. But that's not the way to make him feel it.

THE CHAPLAIN. Ah! there I'm afraid we must differ.

COKESON. It's the same with dogs. If you treat 'em with kindness they'll do anything for you; but to shut 'em up alone, it only makes 'em savage.

THE CHAPLAIN. Surely you should allow those who have had a little more experience than yourself to know what is best for prisoners.

COKESON. [*Doggedly*] I know this young feller, I've watched him for years. He's eurotic—got no stamina. His father died of consumption. I'm thinking of his future. If he's to be kept there shut up by himself, without a cat to keep him company, it'll do him harm. I said to him: "Where do you

feel it?" "I can't tell you, Mr. Cokeson," he said, "but sometimes I could beat my head against the wall." It's not nice.

During this speech the DOCTOR *has entered. He is a medium-sized, rather good-looking man, with a quick eye. He stands leaning against the window.*

THE GOVERNOR. This gentleman thinks the separate is telling on Q 3007—Falder, young thin fellow, star class. What do you say, Doctor Clements?

THE DOCTOR. He doesn't like it, but it's not doing him any harm.

COKESON. But he's told me.

THE DOCTOR. Of course he'd say so, but we can always tell. He's lost no weight since he's been here.

COKESON. It's his state of mind I'm speaking of.

THE DOCTOR. His mind's all right so far. He's nervous, rather melancholy. I don't see signs of anything more. I'm watching him carefully.

COKESON. [*Nonplussed*] I'm glad to hear you say that.

THE CHAPLAIN. [*More suavely*] It's just at this period that we are able to make some impression on them, sir. I am speaking from my special standpoint.

COKESON. [*Turning bewildered to the* GOVERNOR] I *don't* want to be unpleasant, but having given him this news, I do feel it's awkward.

THE GOVERNOR. I'll make a point of seeing him to-day.

COKESON. I'm much obliged to you. I thought perhaps seeing him every day you wouldn't notice it.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Rather sharply*] If any sign of injury to his health shows itself his case will be reported at once. That's fully provided for. [*He rises.*

COKESON. [*Following his own thoughts*] Of course, what you don't see doesn't trouble you; but having seen him, I don't want to have him on my mind.

THE GOVERNOR. I think you may safely leave it to us, sir.

COKESON. [*Mollified and apologetic*] I thought you'd understand me. I'm a plain man—never set myself up against authority. [*Expanding to the* CHAPLAIN] Nothing personal meant. *Good*-morning.

As he goes out the three officials do not look at each other, but their faces wear peculiar expressions.

THE CHAPLAIN. Our friend seems to think that prison is a hospital.

COKESON. [*Returning suddenly with an apologetic air*] There's just one little thing. This woman—I suppose I mustn't ask you to let him see her. It'd be a rare treat for them both. He's thinking about her all the time. Of course she's not his wife. But he's quite safe in here. They're a pitiful couple. You couldn't make an exception?

THE GOVERNOR. [*Wearily*] As you say, my dear sir, I couldn't make an exception; he won't be allowed another visit of any sort till he goes to a convict prison.

COKESON. I see. [*Rather coldly*] Sorry to have troubled you. [*He again goes out.*

THE CHAPLAIN. [*Shrugging his shoulders*] The plain man indeed, poor fellow. Come and have some lunch, Clements?

He and the DOCTOR *go out talking. The* GOVERNOR, *with a sigh, sits down at his table and takes up a pen.*

The curtain falls.

SCENE II

Part of the ground corridor of the prison. The walls are coloured with greenish distemper up to a stripe of deeper green about the height of a man's shoulder, and above this line are whitewashed. The floor is of blackened stones. Daylight is filtering through a heavily barred window at the end. The doors of four cells are visible. Each cell door has a little round peep-hole at the level of a man's eye, covered by a little round disc, which, raised upwards, affords a view of the cell. On the wall, close to each cell door, hangs a little square board with the prisoner's name, number, and record.

Overhead can be seen the iron structures of the first-floor and second-floor corridors.

The WARDER INSTRUCTOR, *a bearded man in blue uniform, with an apron, and some dangling keys, is just emerging from one of the cells.*

INSTRUCTOR. [*Speaking from the door into the cell*] I'll have another bit for you when that's finished.

O'CLEARY. [*Unseen—in an Irish voice*] Little doubt o' that, sirr.

INSTRUCTOR. [*Gossiping*] Well, you'd rather have it than nothing, I s'pose.

O'CLEARY. An' that's the blessed truth.

Sounds are heard of a cell door being closed and locked, and of approaching footsteps.

INSTRUCTOR. [*In a sharp, changed voice*] Look alive over it!

He shuts the cell door, and stands at attention. The GOVERNOR *comes walking down the corridor, followed by* WOODER.

THE GOVERNOR. Anything to report?

INSTRUCTOR. [*Saluting*] Q 3007 [*he points to a cell*] is behind with his work, sir. He'll lose marks to-day.

The GOVERNOR *nods and passes on to the end cell. The* INSTRUCTOR *goes away.*

THE GOVERNOR. This is our maker of saws, isn't it?

He takes the saw from his pocket as WOODER *throws open the door of the cell. The convict* MOANEY *is seen lying on his bed, athwart the cell, with his cap on. He springs up and stands in the middle of the cell. He is a raw-boned fellow, about fifty-six years old, with outstanding bat's ears and fierce, staring, steel-coloured eyes.*

WOODER. Cap off! [MOANEY *removes his cap*] Out here! [MOANEY *comes to the door.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*Beckoning him out into the corridor, and holding up the saw—with the manner of an officer speaking to a private*] Anything to say about this, my man? [MOANEY *is silent*] Come!

MOANEY. It passed the time.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Pointing into the cell*] Not enough to do, eh?

MOANEY. It don't occupy your mind.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Tapping the saw*] You might find a better way than this.

MOANEY. [*Sullenly*] Well! What way? I must keep my hand in against the time I get out. What's the good of anything else to me at my time of life? [*With a gradual change to civility, as his tongue warms*] Ye know that, sir. I'll be in again within a year or two, after I've done this lot. I don't want to disgrace meself when I'm out. *You've* got your pride keeping the prison smart; well, I've got mine. [*Seeing that the* GOVERNOR *is listening with interest, he goes on, pointing to the saw*] I *must* be doin' a little o' this. It's no harm to any one. I was five weeks makin' that saw—a bit of all right it is, too; now I'll get cells, I suppose, or seven days' bread and water. You can't help it, sir, I know that—I quite put meself in your place.

THE GOVERNOR. Now, look here, Moaney, if I pass it over will you give me your word not to try it on

again? Think! [*He goes into the cell, walks to the end of it, mounts the stool, and tries the window-bars*]

THE GOVERNOR. [*Returning*] Well?

MOANEY. [*Who has been reflecting*] I've got another six weeks to do in here, alone. I can't do it and think o' nothing. I must have something to interest me. You've made me a sporting offer, sir, but I can't pass my word about it. I shouldn't like to deceive a gentleman. [*Pointing into the cell*] Another four hours' steady work would have done it.

THE GOVERNOR. Yes, and what then? Caught, brought back, punishment. Five weeks' hard work to make this, and cells at the end of it, while they put a new bar to your window. Is it worth it, Moaney?

MOANEY. [*With a sort of fierceness*] Yes, it is.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Putting his hand to his brow*] Oh, well! Two days' cells—bread and water.

MOANEY. Thank 'e, sir.

He turns quickly like an animal and slips into his cell.

The GOVERNOR *looks after him and shakes his head as* WOODER *closes and locks the cell door.*

THE GOVERNOR. Open Clipton's cell.

WOODER *opens the door of* CLIPTON'S *cell.* CLIPTON *is sitting on a stool just inside the door, at work on a pair of trousers. He is a small, thick, oldish man, with an almost shaven head, and smouldering little dark eyes behind smoked spectacles. He gets up*

and stands motionless in the doorway, peering at his visitors.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Beckoning*] Come out here a minute, Clipton.

CLIPTON, *with a sort of dreadful quietness, comes into the corridor, the needle and thread in his hand. The* GOVERNOR *signs to* WOODER, *who goes into the cell and inspects it carefully.*

THE GOVERNOR. How are your eyes?

CLIPTON. I don't complain of them. I don't see the sun here. [*He makes a stealthy movement, protruding his neck a little*] There's just one thing, Mr. Governor, as you're speaking to me. I wish you'd ask the cove next door here to keep a bit quieter.

THE GOVERNOR. What's the matter? I don't want any tales, Clipton.

CLIPTON. He keeps me awake. I don't know who he is. [*With contempt*] One of this *star* class, I expect. Oughtn't to be here with *us*.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Quietly*] Quite right, Clipton. He'll be moved when there's a cell vacant.

CLIPTON. He knocks about like a wild beast in the early morning. I'm not used to it—stops me getting my sleep out. In the evening too. It's not fair, Mr. Governor, as you're speaking to me. Sleep's the comfort I've got here; I'm entitled to take it out full.

WOODER *comes out of the cell, and instantly, as though extinguished,* CLIPTON *moves with stealthy suddenness back into his cell.*

WOODER. All right, sir.

The GOVERNOR *nods. The door is closed and locked.*

THE GOVERNOR. Which is the man who banged on his door this morning?

WOODER. [*Going towards* O'CLEARY'S *cell*] This one, sir; O'Cleary.

He lifts the disc and glances through the peep-hole.

THE GOVERNOR. Open.

WOODER *throws open the door.* O'CLEARY, *who is seated at a little table by the door as if listening, springs up and stands at attention just inside the doorway. He is a broad-faced, middle-aged man, with a wide, thin, flexible mouth, and little holes under his high cheek-bones.*

THE GOVERNOR. Where's the joke, O'Cleary?

O'CLEARY. The joke, your honour? I've not seen one for a long time.

THE GOVERNOR. Banging on your door?

O'CLEARY. Oh! that!

THE GOVERNOR. It's womanish.

O'CLEARY. An' it's that I'm becoming this two months past.

THE GOVERNOR. Anything to complain of?

O'CLEARY. No, sirr.

THE GOVERNOR. You're an old hand; you ought to know better.

O'CLEARY. Yes, I've been through it all.

THE GOVERNOR. You've got a youngster next door; you'll upset him.

O'CLEARY. It cam' over me, your honour. I can't always be the same steady man.

THE GOVERNOR. Work all right?

O'CLEARY. [*Taking up a rush mat he is making*] Oh! I can do it on me head. It's the miserablest stuff—don't take the brains of a mouse. [*Working his mouth*] It's here I feel it—the want of a little noise—a terrible little wud ease me.

THE GOVERNOR. You know as well as I do that if you were out in the shops you wouldn't be allowed to talk.

O'CLEARY. [*With a look of profound meaning*] Not with my mouth.

THE GOVERNOR. Well, then?

O'CLEARY. But it's the great conversation I'd have.

THE GOVERNOR. [*With a smile*] Well, no more conversation on your door.

O'CLEARY. No, sirr, I wud not have the little wit to repeat meself.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Turning*] Good-night.

O'CLEARY. Good-night, your honour.

He turns into his cell. The GOVERNOR *shuts the door.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*Looking at the record card*] Can't help liking the poor blackguard.

WOODER. He's an amiable man, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Pointing down the corridor*] Ask the doctor to come here, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER *salutes and goes away down the corridor.*

The GOVERNOR *goes to the door of* FALDER'S *cell. He raises his uninjured hand to uncover the peep-hole; but, without uncovering it, shakes his head and drops his hand; then, after scrutinising the record board, he opens the cell door.* FALDER, *who is standing against it, lurches forward.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*Beckoning him out*] Now tell me: can't you settle down, Falder?

FALDER. [*In a breathless voice*] Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. You know what I mean? It's no good running your head against a stone wall, is it?

FALDER. No, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Well, come.

FALDER. I try, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Can't you sleep?

FALDER. Very little. Between two o'clock and getting up's the worst time.

THE GOVERNOR. How's that?

FALDER. [*His lips twitch with a sort of smile*] I don't know, sir. I was always nervous. [*Suddenly voluble*] Everything seems to get such a size then. I feel I'll never get out as long as I live.

THE GOVERNOR. That's morbid, my lad. Pull yourself together.

FALDER. [*With an equally sudden dogged resentment*] Yes—I've got to——

THE GOVERNOR. Think of all these other fellows?

FALDER. They're used to it.

THE GOVERNOR. They all had to go through it once for the first time, just as you're doing now.

FALDER. Yes, sir, I shall get to be like them in time, I suppose.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Rather taken aback*] H'm! Well! That rests with you. Now come. Set your mind to it, like a good fellow. You're still quite young. A man can make himself what he likes.

FALDER. [*Wistfully*] Yes, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. Take a good hold of yourself. Do you read?

FALDER. I don't take the words in. [*Hanging his head*] I know it's no good; but I can't help thinking of what's going on outside. In my cell I can't see out at all. It's thick glass, sir.

THE GOVERNOR. You've had a visitor. Bad news?

FALDER. Yes.

THE GOVERNOR. You mustn't think about it.

FALDER. [*Looking back at his cell*] How can I help it, sir?

He suddenly becomes motionless as WOODER *and the* DOCTOR *approach. The* GOVERNOR *motions to him to go back into his cell.*

FALDER. [*Quick and low*] I'm quite right in my head, sir. [*He goes back into his cell.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*To the* DOCTOR] Just go in and see him, Clements.

The DOCTOR *goes into the cell. The* GOVERNOR *pushes the door to, nearly closing it, and walks towards the window.*

WOODER. [*Following*] Sorry you should be troubled like this, sir. Very contented lot of men, on the whole.

THE GOVERNOR. [*Shortly*] You think so?

WOODER. Yes, sir. It's Christmas doing it, in my opinion.

THE GOVERNOR. [*To himself*] Queer, that!

WOODER. Beg pardon, sir?

THE GOVERNOR. Christmas!

He turns towards the window, leaving WOODER *looking at him with a sort of pained anxiety.*

WOODER. [*Suddenly*] Do you think we make show enough, sir? If you'd like us to have more holly?

THE GOVERNOR. Not at all, Mr. Wooder.

WOODER. Very good, sir.

The DOCTOR *has come out of* FALDER'S *cell, and the* GOVERNOR *beckons to him.*

THE GOVERNOR. Well?

THE DOCTOR. I can't make anything much of him. He's nervous, of course.

THE GOVERNOR. Is there any sort of case to report? Quite frankly, Doctor.

THE DOCTOR. Well, I don't think the separate's doing him any good; but then I could say the same of a lot of them—they'd get on better in the shops, there's no doubt.

THE GOVERNOR. You mean you'd have to recommend others?

THE DOCTOR. A dozen at least. It's on his nerves. There's nothing tangible. That fellow there [*pointing to* O'CLEARY'S *cell*], for instance—feels it just as

much, in his way. If I once get away from physical facts—I shan't know where I am. Conscientiously, sir, I don't know how to differentiate him. He hasn't lost weight. Nothing wrong with his eyes. His pulse is good. Talks all right.

THE GOVERNOR. It doesn't amount to melancholia?

THE DOCTOR. [*Shaking his head*] I can report on him if you like; but if I do I ought to report on others.

THE GOVERNOR. I see. [*Looking towards* FALDER'S *cell*] The poor devil must just stick it then.

As he says this he looks absently at WOODER.

WOODER. Beg pardon, sir?

For answer the GOVERNOR *stares at him, turns on his heel, and walks away. There is a sound as of beating on metal.*

THE GOVERNOR. [*Stopping*] Mr. Wooder?

WOODER. Banging on his door, sir. I thought we should have more of that.

He hurries forward, passing the GOVERNOR, *who follows closely.*

The curtain falls.

SCENE III

FALDER'S *cell, a whitewashed space thirteen feet broad by seven deep, and nine feet high, with a rounded ceiling. The floor is of shiny blackened bricks. The barred window of opaque glass, with a ventilator, is high up in the middle of the end wall. In the*

middle of the opposite end wall is the narrow door. In a corner are the mattress and bedding rolled up (two blankets, two sheets, and a coverlet). Above them is a quarter-circular wooden shelf, on which is a Bible and several little devotional books, piled in a symmetrical pyramid; there are also a black hair-brush, tooth-brush, and a bit of soap. In another corner is the wooden frame of a bed, standing on end. There is a dark ventilator under the window, and another over the door. FALDER'S *work (a shirt to which he is putting buttonholes) is hung to a nail on the wall over a small wooden table, on which the novel "Lorna Doone" lies open. Low down in the corner by the door is a thick glass screen, about a foot square, covering the gas-jet let into the wall. There is also a wooden stool, and a pair of shoes beneath it. Three bright round tins are set under the window.*

In fast-failing daylight, FALDER, *in his stockings, is seen standing motionless, with his head inclined towards the door, listening. He moves a little closer to the door, his stockinged feet making no noise. He stops at the door. He is trying harder and harder to hear something, any little thing that is going on outside. He springs suddenly upright—as if at a sound—and remains perfectly motionless. Then, with a heavy sigh, he moves to his work, and stands looking at it, with his head down; he does a stitch or two, having the air of a man so lost in sadness*

that each stitch is, as it were, a coming to life. Then turning abruptly, he begins pacing the cell, moving his head, like an animal pacing its cage. He stops again at the door, listens, and, placing the palms of his hands against it with his fingers spread out, leans his forehead against the iron. Turning from it, presently, he moves slowly back towards the window, tracing his way with his finger along the top line of the distemper that runs round the wall. He stops under the window, and, picking up the lid of one of the tins, peers into it. It has grown very nearly dark. Suddenly the lid falls out of his hand with a clatter—the only sound that has broken the silence—and he stands staring intently at the wall where the stuff of the shirt is hanging rather white in the darkness—he seems to be seeing somebody or something there. There is a sharp tap and click; the cell light behind the glass screen has been turned up. The cell is brightly lighted. FALDER *is seen gasping for breath.*

A sound from far away, as of distant, dull beating on thick metal, is suddenly audible. FALDER *shrinks back, not able to bear this sudden clamour. But the sound grows, as though some great tumbril were rolling towards the cell. And gradually it seems to hypnotise him. He begins creeping inch by inch nearer to the door. The banging sound, travelling from cell to cell, draws closer and closer;* FALDER'S *hands are seen moving as if his spirit had already*

joined in this beating, and the sound swells till it seems to have entered the very cell. He suddenly raises his clenched fists. Panting violently, he flings himself at his door, and beats on it.

The curtain falls.

ACT IV

The scene is again COKESON'S *room, at a few minutes to ten of a March morning, two years later. The doors are all open.* SWEEDLE, *now blessed with a sprouting moustache, is getting the offices ready. He arranges papers on* COKESON'S *table; then goes to a covered washstand, raises the lid, and looks at himself in the mirror. While he is gazing his fill* RUTH HONEYWILL *comes in through the outer office and stands in the doorway. There seems a kind of exultation and excitement behind her habitual impassivity.*

SWEEDLE. [*Suddenly seeing her, and dropping the lid of the washstand with a bang*] Hello! It's you!

RUTH. Yes.

SWEEDLE. There's only me here! They don't waste their time hurrying down in the morning. Why, it must be two years since we had the pleasure of seeing you. [*Nervously*] What have you been doing with yourself?

RUTH. [*Sardonically*] Living.

SWEEDLE. [*Impressed*] If you want to see *him* [*he points to* COKESON'S *chair*], he'll be here directly —never misses—not much. [*Delicately*] I hope our

friend's back from the country. His time's been up these three months, if I remember. [RUTH *nods*] I was awful sorry about that. The governor made a mistake—if you ask me.

RUTH. He did.

SWEEDLE. He ought to have given him a chanst. And, *I* say, the judge ought to ha' let him go after that. They've forgot what human nature's like. Whereas *we* know. RUTH *gives him a honeyed smile.*

SWEEDLE. They come down on you like a cartload of bricks, flatten you out, and when you don't swell up again they complain of it. I know 'em—seen a lot of that sort of thing in my time. [*He shakes his head in the plenitude of wisdom*] Why, only the other day the governor——

But COKESON *has come in through the outer office; brisk with east wind, and decidedly greyer.*

COKESON. [*Drawing off his coat and gloves*] Why! it's you! [*Then motioning* SWEEDLE *out, and closing the door*] Quite a stranger! Must be two years. D'you want to see me? I can give you a minute. Sit down! Family well?

RUTH. Yes. I'm not living where I was.

COKESON. [*Eyeing her askance*] I hope things are more comfortable at home.

RUTH. I couldn't stay with Honeywill, after all.

COKESON. You haven't done anything rash, I hope. I should be sorry if you'd done anything rash.

RUTH. I've kept the children with me.

COKESON. [*Beginning to feel that things are not so jolly as he had hoped*] Well, I'm glad to have seen you. You've not heard from the young man, I suppose, since he came out?

RUTH. Yes, I ran across him yesterday.

COKESON. I hope he's well.

RUTH. [*With sudden fierceness*] He can't get anything to do. It's dreadful to see him. He's just skin and bone.

COKESON. [*With genuine concern*] Dear me! I'm sorry to hear that. [*On his guard again*] Didn't they find him a place when his time was up?

RUTH. He was only there three weeks. It got out.

COKESON. I'm sure I don't know what I can do for you. I don't like to be snubby.

RUTH. I can't bear his being like that.

COKESON. [*Scanning her not unprosperous figure*] I know his relations aren't very forthy about him. Perhaps *you* can do something for him, till he finds his feet.

RUTH. Not now. I could have—but not *now*.

COKESON. I don't understand.

RUTH. [*Proudly*] I've seen him again—that's all over.

COKESON. [*Staring at her—disturbed*] I'm a family man—I don't want to hear anything unpleasant. Excuse me—I'm very busy.

RUTH. I'd have gone home to my people in the country long ago, but they've never got over me marry-

ing Honeywill. I never was waywise, Mr. Cokeson, but I'm proud. I was only a girl, you see, when I married him. I thought the world of him, of course . . . he used to come travelling to our farm.

COKESON. [*Regretfully*] I did hope you'd have got on better, after you saw me.

RUTH. He used me worse than ever. He couldn't break my nerve, but I lost my health; and then he began knocking the children about. . . . I couldn't stand that. I wouldn't go back now, if he were dying.

COKESON. [*Who has risen and is shifting about as though dodging a stream of lava*] We mustn't be violent, must we?

RUTH. [*Smouldering*] A man that can't behave better than that—— [*There is silence.*

COKESON. [*Fascinated in spite of himself*] Then there you were! And what did you do then?

RUTH. [*With a shrug*] Tried the same as when I left him before . . . making skirts . . . cheap things. It was the best I could get, but I never made more than ten shillings a week, buying my own cotton and working all day; I hardly ever got to bed till past twelve. I kept at it for nine months. [*Fiercely*] Well, I'm not fit for that; I wasn't made for it. I'd rather die.

COKESON. My dear woman! We mustn't talk like that.

RUTH. It was starvation for the children too—after what they'd always had. I soon got not to care. I used to be too tired. [*She is silent.*

COKESON. [*With fearful curiosity*] Why, what happened then?

RUTH. [*With a laugh*] My employer happened then—he's happened ever since.

COKESON. Dear! Oh dear! I never came across a thing like this.

RUTH. [*Dully*] He's treated me all right. But I've done with that. [*Suddenly her lips begin to quiver, and she hides them with the back of her hand*] I never thought I'd see *him* again, you see. It was just a chance I met him by Hyde Park. We went in there and sat down, and he told me all about himself. Oh! Mr. Cokeson, give him another chance.

COKESON. [*Greatly disturbed*] Then you've both lost your livings! What a horrible position!

RUTH. If he could only get here—where there's nothing to find out about him!

COKESON. We can't have anything derogative to the firm.

RUTH. I've no one else to go to.

COKESON. I'll speak to the partners, but I don't think they'll take him, under the circumstances. I don't really.

RUTH. He came with me; he's down there in the street. [*She points to the window.*

COKESON. [*On his dignity*] He shouldn't have done that until he's sent for. [*Then softening at the look on her face*] We've got a vacancy, as it happens, but I can't promise anything.

RUTH. It would be the saving of him.

COKESON. Well, I'll do what I can, but I'm not sanguine. Now tell him that I don't want him till I see how things are. Leave your address? [*Repeating her*] 83 Mullingar Street? [*He notes it on blotting-paper*] Good-morning.

RUTH. Thank you.

She moves towards the door, turns as if to speak, but does not, and goes away.

COKESON. [*Wiping his head and forehead with a large white cotton handkerchief*] What a business! *Then looking amongst his papers, he sounds his bell.* SWEEDLE *answers it*]

COKESON. Was that young Richards coming here to-day after the clerk's place?

SWEEDLE. Yes.

COKESON. Well, keep him in the air; I don't want to see him yet.

SWEEDLE. What shall I tell him, sir?

COKESON. [*With asperity*] Invent something. Use your brains. Don't stump him off altogether.

SWEEDLE. Shall I tell him that we've got illness, sir?

COKESON. No! Nothing untrue. Say I'm not here to-day.

SWEEDLE. Yes, sir. Keep him hankering?

COKESON. Exactly. And look here. You remember Falder? I may be having him round to see me. Now, treat him like you'd have him treat you in a similar position.

SWEEDLE. I naturally should do.

COKESON. That's right. When a man's down never hit 'im. 'Tisn't necessary. Give him a hand up. That's a metaphor I recommend to you in life. It's sound policy.

SWEEDLE. Do you think the governors will take him on again, sir?

COKESON. Can't say anything about that. [*At the sound of some one having entered the outer office*] Who's there?

SWEEDLE. [*Going to the door and looking*] It's Falder, sir.

COKESON. [*Vexed*] Dear me! That's very naughty of her. Tell him to call again. I don't want——

He breaks off as FALDER *comes in.* FALDER *is thin, pale, older, his eyes have grown more restless. His clothes are very worn and loose.*

SWEEDLE, *nodding cheerfully, withdraws.*

COKESON. Glad to see you. You're rather previous. [*Trying to keep things pleasant*] Shake hands! She's striking while the iron's hot. [*He wipes his forehead*] I don't blame her. She's anxious.

FALDER *timidly takes* COKESON'S *hand and glances towards the partners' door.*

COKESON. No—not yet! Sit down! [FALDER *sits in the chair at the side of* COKESON'S *table, on which he places his cap*] Now you are here I'd like you to give me a little account of yourself. [*Looking at him over his spectacles*] How's your health?

FALDER. I'm alive, Mr. Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Preoccupied*] I'm glad to hear that. About this matter. I don't like doing anything out of the ordinary; it's not my habit. I'm a plain man, and I want everything smooth and straight. But I promised your friend to speak to the partners, and I always keep my word.

FALDER. I just want a chance, Mr. Cokeson. I've paid for that job a thousand times and more. I have, sir. No one knows. They say I weighed more when I came out than when I went in. They couldn't weigh me here [*he touches his head*] or here [*he touches his heart, and gives a sort of laugh*]. Till last night I'd have thought there was nothing in here at all.

COKESON. [*Concerned*] You've not got heart disease?

FALDER. Oh! they passed me sound enough.

COKESON. But they got you a place, didn't they?

FALDER. Yes; very good people, knew all about it—very kind to me. I thought I was going to get on first rate. But one day, all of a sudden, the other clerks got wind of it. . . . I couldn't stick it, Mr. Cokeson, I couldn't, sir.

COKESON. Easy, my dear fellow, easy!

FALDER. I had one small job after that, but it didn't last.

COKESON. How was that?

FALDER. It's no good deceiving you, Mr. Cokeson. The fact is, I seem to be struggling against a thing that's all round me. I can't explain it: it's as if I was in a net; as fast as I cut it here, it grows up there.

I didn't act as I ought to have, about references; but what are you to do? You must have them. And that made me afraid, and I left. In fact, I'm—I'm afraid all the time now.

He bows his head and leans dejectedly silent over the table.

COKESON. I feel for you—I do really. Aren't your sisters going to do anything for you?

FALDER. One's in consumption. And the other——

COKESON. Ye . . . es. She told me her husband wasn't quite pleased with you.

FALDER. When I went there—they were at supper—my sister wanted to give me a kiss—I know. But he just looked at her, and said: "What have you come for?" Well, I pocketed my pride and I said: "Aren't you going to give me your hand, Jim? Cis is, I know," I said. "Look here!" he said, "that's all very well, but we'd better come to an understanding. I've been expecting you, and I've made up my mind. I'll give you fifteen pounds to go to Canada with." "I see," I said—"good riddance! No, thanks; keep your fifteen pounds." Friendship's a queer thing when you've been where I have.

COKESON. I understand. Will you take the fifteen pound from me? [*Flustered, as* FALDER *regards him with a queer smile*] Quite without prejudice; I meant it kindly.

FALDER. I'm not allowed to leave the country.

COKESON. Oh! ye . . . es—ticket-of-leave? You aren't looking the thing.

FALDER. I've slept in the Park three nights this week. The dawns aren't all poetry there. But meeting her—I feel a different man this morning. I've often thought the being fond of her's the best thing about me; it's sacred, somehow—and yet it did for me. That's queer, isn't it?

COKESON. I'm sure we're all very sorry for you.

FALDER. That's what I've found, Mr. Cokeson. Awfully sorry for me. [*With quiet bitterness*] But it doesn't do to associate with criminals!

COKESON. Come, come, it's no use calling yourself names. That never did a man any good. Put a face on it.

FALDER. It's easy enough to put a face on it, sir, when you're independent. Try it when you're down like me. They talk about giving you your deserts. Well, I think I've had just a bit over.

COKESON. [*Eyeing him askance over his spectacles*] I hope they haven't made a Socialist of you.

FALDER *is suddenly still, as if brooding over his past self; he utters a peculiar laugh.*

COKESON. You must give them credit for the best intentions. Really you must. Nobody wishes you harm, I'm sure.

FALDER. I believe that, Mr. Cokeson. Nobody wishes you harm, but they down you all the same. This feeling—— [*He stares round him, as though at something closing in*] It's crushing me. [*With sudden impersonality*] I know it is.

COKESON. [*Horribly disturbed*] There's nothing there!

We must try and take it quiet. I'm sure I've often had you in my prayers. Now leave it to me. I'll use my gumption and take 'em when they're jolly.

[*As he speaks the two partners come in.*

COKESON. [*Rather disconcerted, but trying to put them all at ease*] I didn't expect you quite so soon. I've just been having a talk with this young man. I think you'll remember him.

JAMES. [*With a grave, keen look*] Quite well. How are you, Falder?

WALTER. [*Holding out his hand almost timidly*] Very glad to see you again, Falder.

FALDER. [*Who has recovered his self-control, takes the hand*] Thank you, sir.

COKESON. Just a word, Mr. James. [*To* FALDER, *pointing to the clerks' office*] You might go in there a minute. You know your way. Our junior won't be coming this morning. His wife's just had a little family.

FALDER *goes uncertainly out into the clerks' office.*

COKESON. [*Confidentially*] I'm bound to tell you all about it. He's quite penitent. But there's a prejudice against him. And you're not seeing him to advantage this morning; he's under-nourished. It's very trying to go without your dinner.

JAMES. Is that so, Cokeson?

COKESON. I wanted to ask you. He's had his lesson. Now *we* know all about him, and we want a clerk. There is a young fellow applying, but I'm keeping him in the air.

JAMES. A gaol-bird in the office, Cokeson? I don't see it.

WALTER. "The rolling of the chariot-wheels of Justice!" I've never got that out of my head.

JAMES. I've nothing to reproach myself with in this affair. What's he been doing since he came out?

COKESON. He's had one or two places, but he hasn't kept them. He's sensitive—quite natural. Seems to fancy everybody's down on him.

JAMES. Bad sign. Don't like the fellow—never did from the first. "Weak character" 's written all over him.

WALTER. I think we owe him a leg up.

JAMES. He brought it all on himself.

WALTER. The doctrine of full responsibility doesn't quite hold in these days.

JAMES. [*Rather grimly*] You'll find it safer to hold it for all that, my boy.

WALTER. For oneself, yes—not for other people, thanks.

JAMES. Well! I don't want to be hard.

COKESON. I'm glad to hear you say that. He seems to see something [*spreading his arms*] round him. 'Tisn't healthy.

JAMES. What about that woman he was mixed up with? I saw some one uncommonly like her outside as we came in.

COKESON. *That!* Well, I can't keep anything from you. He has met her.

JAMES. Is she with her husband?

COKESON. No.

JAMES. Falder living with her, I suppose?

COKESON. [*Desperately trying to retain the new-found jollity*] I don't know that of my own knowledge. 'Tisn't my business.

JAMES. It's *our* business, if we're going to engage him, Cokeson.

COKESON. [*Reluctantly*] I ought to tell you, perhaps. I've had the party here this morning.

JAMES. I thought so. [*To* WALTER] No, my dear boy, it won't do. Too shady altogether!

COKESON. The two things together make it very awkward for you—I see that.

WALTER. [*Tentatively*] I don't quite know what we have to do with his private life.

JAMES. No, no! He must make a clean sheet of it, or he can't come here.

WALTER. Poor devil!

COKESON. Will you have him in? [*And as* JAMES *nods*] I think I can get him to see reason.

JAMES. [*Grimly*] You can leave that to me, Cokeson.

WALTER. [*To* JAMES, *in a low voice, while* COKESON *is summoning* FALDER] His whole future may depend on what we do, dad.

FALDER *comes in. He has pulled himself together, and presents a steady front.*

JAMES. Now look here, Falder. My son and I want to give you another chance; but there are two things I must say to you. In the first place: It's no good coming here as a victim. If you've any notion that

you've been unjustly treated—get rid of it. You can't play fast and loose with morality and hope to go scot-free. If Society didn't take care of itself, nobody would—the sooner you realise that the better.

FALDER. Yes, sir; but—may I say something?

JAMES. Well?

FALDER. I had a lot of time to think it over in prison. [*He stops.*

COKESON. [*Encouraging him*] I'm sure you did.

FALDER. There were all sorts there. And what I mean, sir, is, that if we'd been treated differently the first time, and put under somebody that could look after us a bit, and not put in prison, not a quarter of us would ever have got there.

JAMES. [*Shaking his head*] I'm afraid I've very grave doubts of that, Falder.

FALDER. [*With a gleam of malice*] Yes, sir, so I found.

JAMES. My good fellow, don't forget that you began it.

FALDER. I never wanted to do wrong.

JAMES. Perhaps not. But you did.

FALDER. [*With all the bitterness of his past suffering*] It's knocked me out of time. [*Pulling himself up*] That is, I mean, I'm not what I was.

JAMES. This isn't encouraging for us, Falder.

COKESON. He's putting it awkwardly, Mr. James.

FALDER. [*Throwing over his caution from the intensity of his feeling*] I mean it, Mr. Cokeson.

JAMES. Now, lay aside all those thoughts, Falder, and look to the future.

FALDER. [*Almost eagerly*] Yes, sir, but you don't understand what prison is. It's here it gets you.

He grips his chest.

COKESON. [*In a whisper to* JAMES] I told you he wanted nourishment.

WALTER. Yes, but, my dear fellow, that'll pass away. Time's merciful.

FALDER. [*With his face twitching*] I hope so, sir.

JAMES. [*Much more gently*] Now, my boy, what you've got to do is to put all the past behind you and build yourself up a steady reputation. And that brings me to the second thing. This woman you were mixed up with—you must give us your word, you know, to have done with that. There's no chance of your keeping straight if you're going to begin your future with such a relationship.

FALDER. [*Looking from one to the other with a hunted expression*] But sir . . . but sir . . . it's the one thing I looked forward to all that time. And she too . . . I couldn't find her before last night.

During this and what follows COKESON *becomes more and more uneasy.*

JAMES. This is painful, Falder. But you must see for yourself that it's impossible for a firm like this to close its eyes to everything. Give us this proof of your resolve to keep straight, and you can come back—not otherwise.

FALDER. [*After staring at* JAMES, *suddenly stiffens himself*] I couldn't give her up. I couldn't! Oh, sir!

I'm all she's got to look to. And I'm sure she's all I've got.

JAMES. I'm very sorry, Falder, but I must be firm. It's for the benefit of you both in the long run. No good can come of this connection. It was the cause of all your disaster.

FALDER. But sir, it means—having gone through all that—getting broken up—my nerves are in an awful state—for nothing. I did it for her.

JAMES. Come! If she's anything of a woman she'll see it for herself. She won't want to drag you down further. If there were a prospect of your being able to marry her—it might be another thing.

FALDER. It's not my fault, sir, that she couldn't get rid of him—she would have if she could. That's been the whole trouble from the beginning. [*Looking suddenly at* WALTER] . . . If anybody would help her! It's only money wanted now, I'm sure.

COKESON. [*Breaking in, as* WALTER *hesitates, and is about to speak*] I don't think we need consider that —it's rather far-fetched.

FALDER. [*To* WALTER, *appealing*] He must have given her full cause since; she could prove that he drove her to leave him.

WALTER. I'm inclined to do what you say, Falder, if it can be managed.

FALDER. Oh, sir!

He goes to the window and looks down into the street.

COKESON. [*Hurriedly*] You don't take me, Mr. Walter. I have my reasons.

FALDER. [*From the window*] She's down there, sir. Will you see her? I can beckon to her from here.

WALTER *hesitates, and looks from* COKESON *to* JAMES.

JAMES. [*With a sharp nod*] Yes, let her come.

FALDER *beckons from the window.*

COKESON. [*In a low fluster to* JAMES *and* WALTER] No, Mr. James. She's not been quite what she ought to ha' been, while this young man's been away. She's lost her chance. We can't consult how to swindle the Law.

FALDER *has come from the window. The three men look at him in a sort of awed silence.*

FALDER. [*With instinctive apprehension of some change—looking from one to the other*] There's been nothing between us, sir, to prevent it. . . . What I said at the trial was true. And last night we only just sat in the Park.

SWEEDLE *comes in from the outer office.*

COKESON. What is it?

SWEEDLE. Mrs. Honeywill. [*There is silence.*

JAMES. Show her in.

RUTH *comes slowly in, and stands stoically with* FALDER *on one side and the three men on the other. No one speaks.* COKESON *turns to his table, bending over his*

papers as though the burden of the situation were forcing him back into his accustomed groove.

JAMES. [*Sharply*] Shut the door there. [SWEEDLE *shuts the door*] We've asked you to come up because there are certain facts to be faced in this matter. I understand you have only just met Falder again.

RUTH. Yes—only yesterday.

JAMES. He's told us about himself, and we're very sorry for him. I've promised to take him back here if he'll make a fresh start. [*Looking steadily at* RUTH] This is a matter that requires courage, ma'am.

RUTH, *who is looking at* FALDER, *begins to twist her hands in front of her as though prescient of disaster.*

FALDER. Mr. Walter How is good enough to say that he'll help us to get you a divorce.

RUTH *flashes a startled glance at* JAMES *and* WALTER.

JAMES. I don't think that's practicable, Falder.

FALDER. But, sir——!

JAMES. [*Steadily*] Now, Mrs. Honeywill. You're fond of him.

RUTH. Yes, sir; I love him.

She looks miserably at FALDER.

JAMES. Then you don't want to stand in his way, do you?

RUTH. [*In a faint voice*] I could take care of him.

JAMES. The best way you can take care of him will be to give him up.

FALDER. Nothing shall make me give you up. You can get a divorce. There's been nothing between us, has there?

RUTH. [*Mournfully shaking her head—without looking at him*] No.

FALDER. We'll keep apart till it's over, sir; if you'll only help us—we promise.

JAMES. [*To* RUTH] You see the thing plainly, don't you? You see what I mean?

RUTH. [*Just above a whisper*] Yes.

COKESON. [*To himself*] There's a dear woman.

JAMES. The situation is impossible.

RUTH. Must I, sir?

JAMES. [*Forcing himself to look at her*] I put it to you, ma'am. His future is in your hands.

RUTH. [*Miserably*] I want to do the best for him.

JAMES. [*A little huskily*] That's right, that's right!

FALDER. I don't understand. You're not going to give me up—after all this? There's something—— [*Starting forward to* JAMES] Sir, I swear solemnly there's been nothing between us.

JAMES. I believe you, Falder. Come, my lad, be as plucky as she is.

FALDER. Just now you were going to help us. [*He stares at* RUTH, *who is standing absolutely still; his face and hands twitch and quiver as the truth dawns on him*] What is it? You've not been——

WALTER. Father!

JAMES. [*Hurriedly*] There there! That'll do, that'll

do! I'll give you your chance, Falder. Don't let me know what you do with yourselves, that's all.

FALDER. [*As if he has not heard*] Ruth?

RUTH looks at him; and FALDER *covers his face with his hands. There is silence.*

COKESON. [*Suddenly*] There's some one out there. [*To* RUTH] Go in here. You'll feel better by yourself for a minute.

He points to the clerks' room and moves towards the outer office. FALDER *does not move.* RUTH *puts out her hand timidly. He shrinks back from the touch. She turns and goes miserably into the clerks' room. With a brusque movement he follows, seizing her by the shoulder just inside the doorway.* COKESON *shuts the door.*

JAMES. [*Pointing to the outer office*] Get rid of that, whoever it is.

SWEEDLE. [*Opening the office door, in a scared voice*] Detective-Sergeant Wister.

The detective enters, and closes the door behind him.

WISTER. Sorry to disturb you, sir. A clerk you had here, two years and a half ago. I arrested him in this room.

JAMES. What about him?

WISTER. I thought perhaps I might get his whereabouts from you. [*There is an awkward silence.*

COKESON. [*Pleasantly, coming to the rescue*] We're not responsible for his movements; you know that.

JAMES. What do you want with him?

WISTER. He's failed to report himself this last four weeks.

WALTER. How d'you mean?

WISTER. Ticket-of-leave won't be up for another six months, sir.

WALTER. Has he to keep in touch with the police till then?

WISTER. We're bound to know where he sleeps every night. I dare say we shouldn't interfere, sir, even though he hasn't reported himself. But we've just heard there's a serious matter of obtaining employment with a forged reference. What with the two things together—we must have him.

Again there is silence. WALTER *and* COKESON *steal glances at* JAMES, *who stands staring steadily at the detective.*

COKESON. [*Expansively*] We're very busy at the moment. If you could make it convenient to call again we might be able to tell you then.

JAMES. [*Decisively*] I'm a servant of the Law, but I dislike peaching. In fact, I can't do such a thing. If you want him you must find him without us.

As he speaks his eye falls on FALDER'S *cap, still lying on the table, and his face contracts.*

WISTER. [*Noting the gesture—quietly*] Very good, sir. I ought to warn you that, having broken the terms of his licence, he's still a convict, and sheltering a convict——

JAMES. I shelter no one. But you mustn't come here and ask questions which it's not my business to answer.

WISTER. [*Dryly*] I won't trouble you further then, gentlemen.

COKESON. I'm sorry we couldn't give you the information. You quite understand, don't you? Good-morning!

WISTER *turns to go, but instead of going to the door of the outer office he goes to the door of the clerks' room.*

COKESON. The other door . . . the other door!

WISTER *opens the clerks' door.* RUTH'S *voice is heard: "Oh, do!" and* FALDER'S: *"I can't!" There is a little pause; then, with sharp fright,* RUTH *says: "Who's that?"* WISTER *has gone in.*

The three men look aghast at the door.

WISTER. [*From within*] Keep back, please!

He comes swiftly out with his arm twisted in FALDER'S. *The latter gives a white, staring look at the three men.*

WALTER. Let him go this time, for God's sake!

WISTER. I couldn't take the responsibility, sir.

FALDER. [*With a queer, desperate laugh*] Good!

Flinging a look back at RUTH, *he throws up his head, and goes out through the outer office, half dragging* WISTER *after him.*

WALTER. [*With despair*] That finishes him. It'll go on for ever now.

SWEEDLE can be seen staring through the outer door. There are sounds of footsteps descending the stone stairs; suddenly a dull thud, a faint "My God!" in WISTER'S *voice.*

JAMES. What's that?

SWEEDLE dashes forward. The door swings to behind him. There is dead silence.

WALTER. [*Starting forward to the inner room*] The woman—she's fainting!

He and COKESON *support the fainting* RUTH *from the doorway of the clerks' room.*

COKESON. [*Distracted*] Here, my dear! There, there!

WALTER. Have you any brandy?

COKESON. I've got sherry.

WALTER. Get it, then. Quick!

He places RUTH *in a chair—which* JAMES *has dragged forward.*

COKESON. [*With sherry*] Here! It's good strong sherry. [*They try to force the sherry between her lips. There is the sound of feet, and they stop to listen.*

*The outer door is reopened—*WISTER *and* SWEEDLE *are seen carrying some burden.*

JAMES. [*Hurrying forward*] What is it?

They lay the burden down in the outer office, out of sight, and all but RUTH *cluster round it, speaking in hushed voices.*

WISTER. He jumped—neck's broken.

WALTER. Good God!

WISTER. He must have been mad to think he could give me the slip like that. And what was it—just a few months!

WALTER. [*Bitterly*] Was that all?

JAMES. What a desperate thing! [*Then, in a voice unlike his own*] Run for a doctor—you! [SWEEDLE *rushes from the outeroffice*] An ambulance!

WISTER *goes out. On* RUTH'S *face an expression of fear and horror has been seen growing, as if she dared not turn towards the voices. She now rises and steals towards them.*

WALTER. [*Turning suddenly*] Look!

The three men shrink back out of her way, one by one, into COKESON'S *room.* RUTH *drops on her knees by the body.*

RUTH. [*In a whisper*] What is it? He's not breathing. [*She crouches over him*] My dear! My pretty!

In the outer office doorway the figures of men are seen standing.

RUTH. [*Leaping to her feet*] No, no! No, no! He's dead! [*The figures of the men shrink back.*

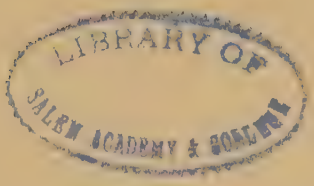
COKESON. [*Stealing forward. In a hoarse voice*] There, there, poor dear woman!

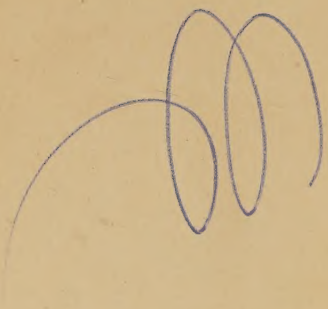
At the sound behind her RUTH *faces round at him.*

COKESON. No one'll touch him now! Never again! He's safe with gentle Jesus!

RUTH *stands as though turned to stone in the doorway staring at* COKESON, *who, bending humbly before her, holds out his hand as one would to a lost dog.*

The curtain falls.





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